

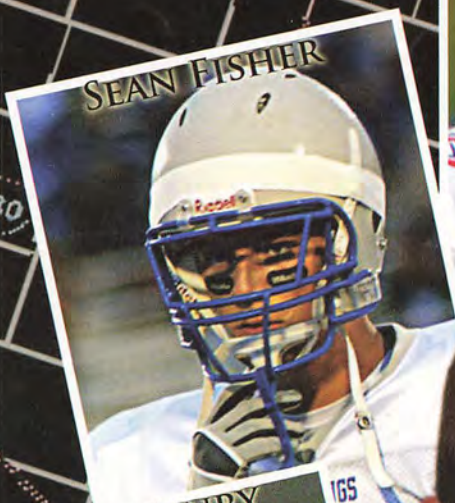
# Huskers Illustrated

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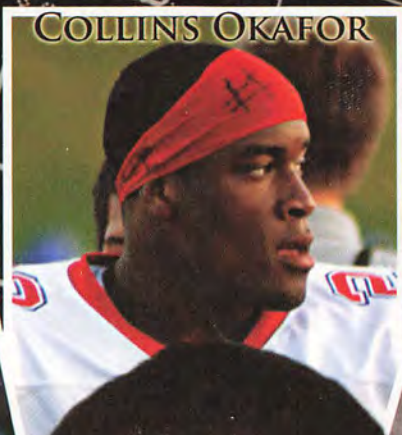
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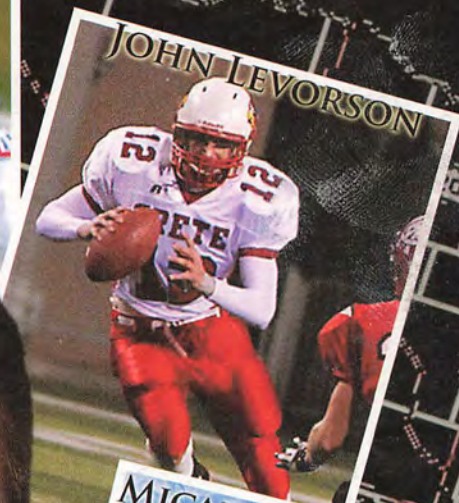
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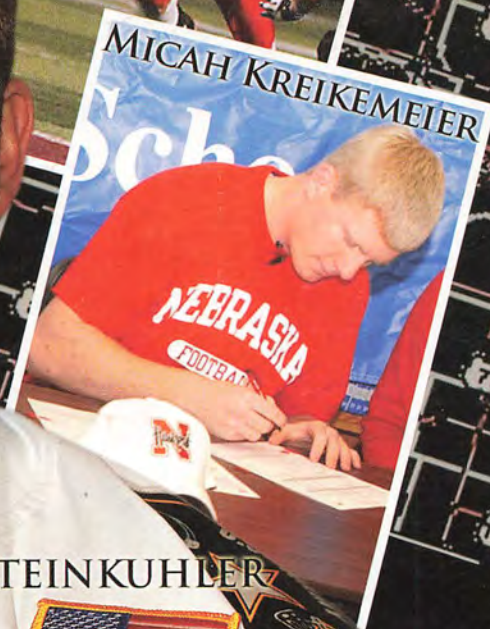
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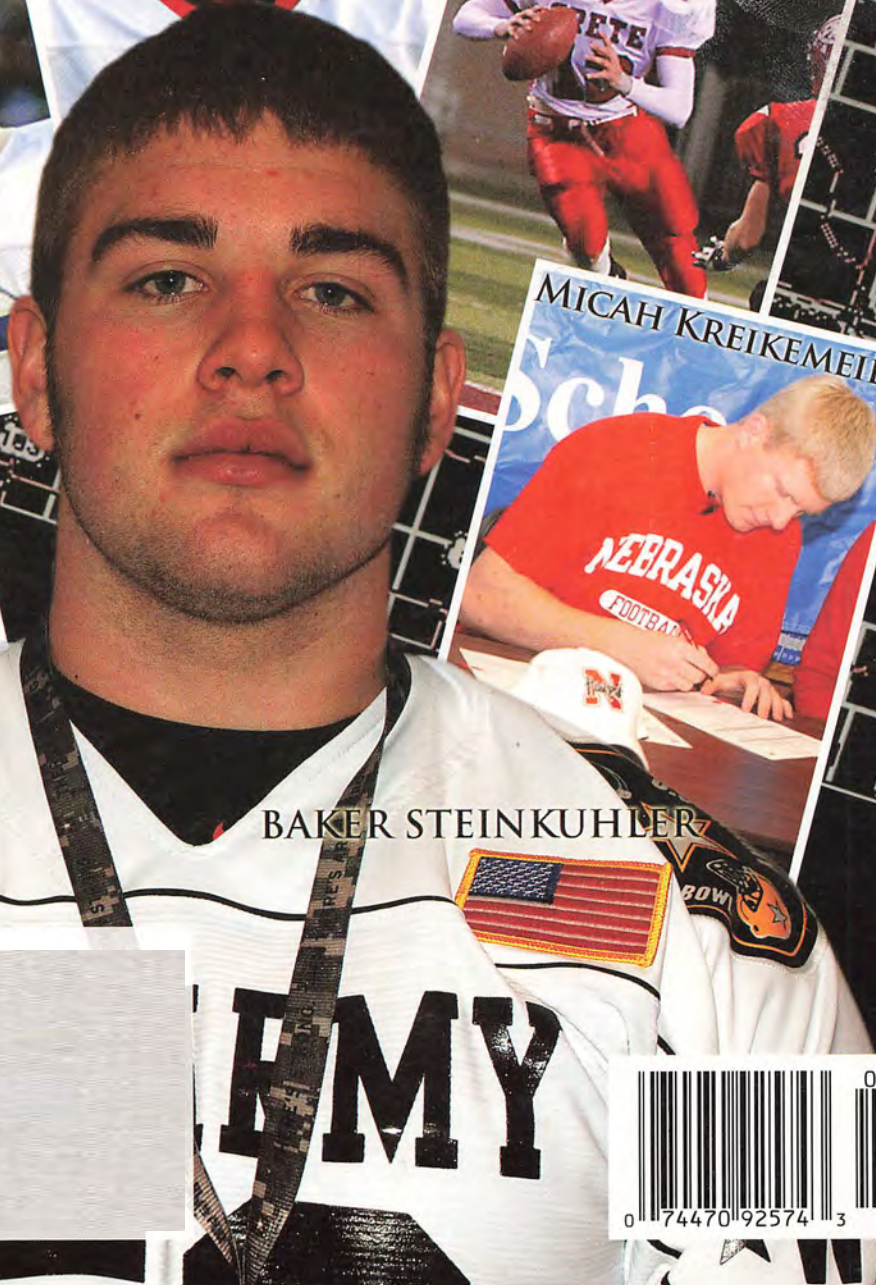
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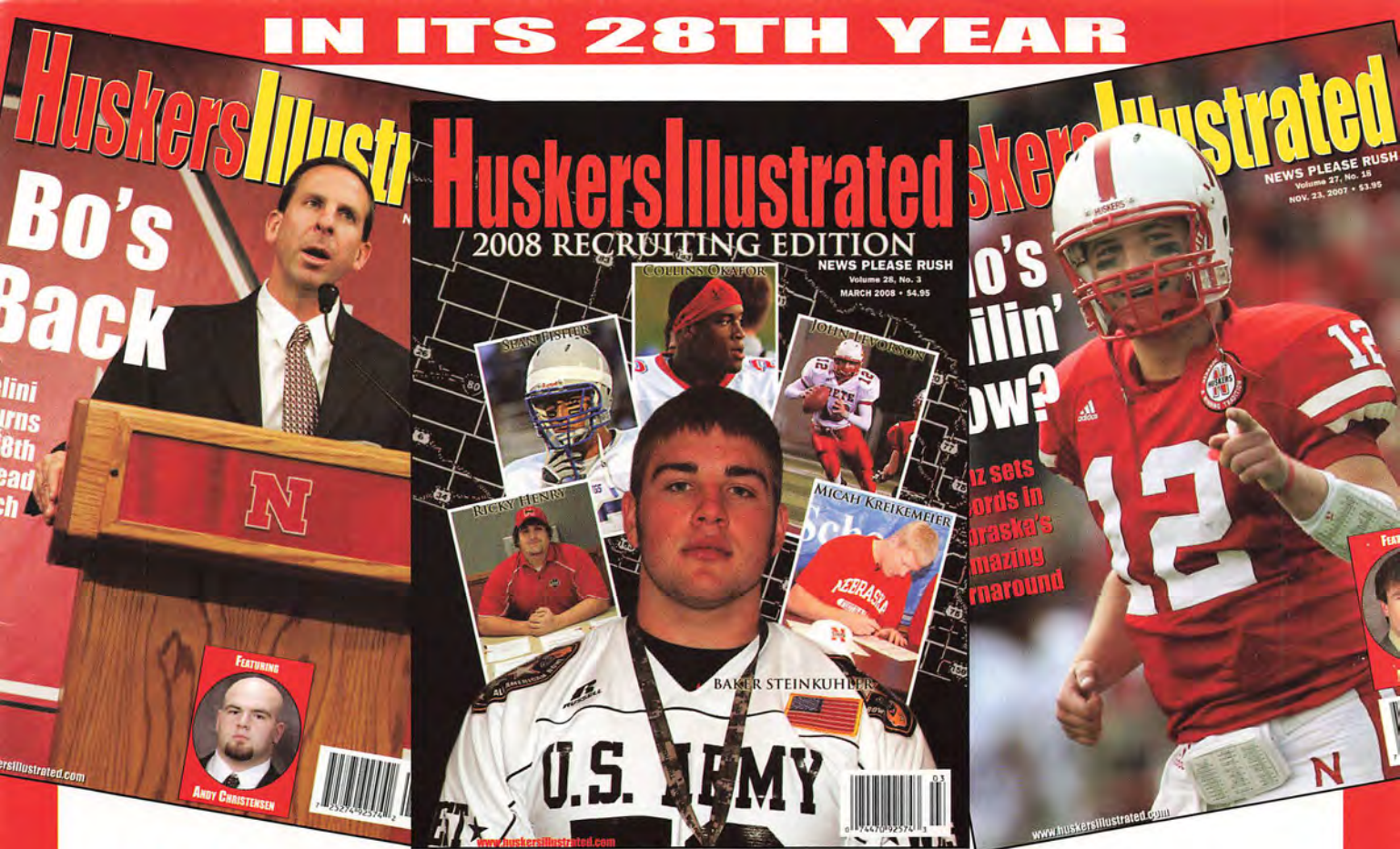
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## Time Will Tell

**Nebraska's 2008 recruiting class was built, then rebuilt**



**Brian Hill**

IT'S ALWAYS fascinating to follow the progress of each year's recruiting class, and probably more so when that class is a product of two different coaching staffs.

As you are probably aware, this recruiting class was filling up in October, then lost a number of players before and during the coaching change. It was rebuilt in relatively short order by Bo Pelini and Co.

Quarterback Blaine Gabbert, running back Jonas Gray and offensive lineman Trevor Robinson were among those once committed who ended up going elsewhere.

"I didn't really pay attention to losing recruits. That's for the recruiting services to worry about," Pelini said at his signing day news conference. "We don't pay a whole lot of attention to that. You have not gained or lost anybody until that fax comes across on signing day. That's just the nature of recruiting today."

You can read much, much more about the 28 players in Nebraska's 2008 recruiting class in this special edition of *Huskers Illustrated*. Our recruiting edition cover features the six Nebraskans in the class, including Baker Steinkuhler, ranked as a five-star recruit by Rivals.com and the nation's top high school lineman, according to Parade

magazine. He is the son of Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award winner Dean Steinkuhler and the brother of NU defensive lineman Ty Steinkuhler.

Two of the other Nebraskans are second-generation Huskers. Sean Fisher is the son of Todd Fisher, who lettered as a defensive back in 1983, and Micah Kreikemeier's father Keith played as a walk-on from 1981 to 1983.

Pelini made sure that Nebraska's newest walk-ons received a share of the attention. The names of 18 were announced on signing day, and that

number was expected to nearly double as paperwork was completed. The walk-on list included David Pillen, Brent Moravec and Steve Spratte, whose fathers were Huskers, and Jordan Makovicka, the fourth brother to be a part of the NU program.

"It goes to show that the commitment by the state of Nebraska, by the coaches, by the young men that decided to come on as

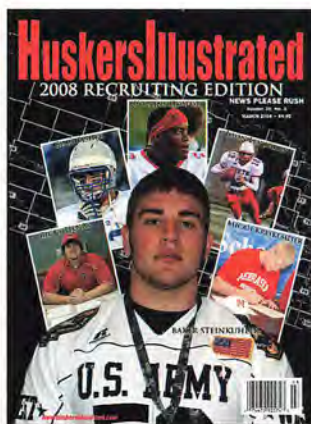
walk-ons, and by the program that we're committed to getting the walk-on program back on its feet," Pelini said, "and it is a huge part of our future."

Husker fans obviously are excited to get a glimpse of that future.

Tickets for the April 19 Red-White Spring Game went on sale Feb. 6, and more than 22,700 tickets had been sold by 5 p.m. that day, including more than 5,800 on-line ticket sales in the first hour.

Two members of the current recruiting class are expected to take part in spring drills — tight end Tyson Hetzer, a junior college transfer, and quarterback Kody Spano, who graduated from high school and enrolled at NU in January. The rest will join them in August.

"You recruit talent, you recruit potential, but that's about what it is," Pelini said. "And what becomes of this class we'll find out a year from now, two years from now, three, four years down the road." ■



### On The Cover

Six Nebraskans were among the 28-player signing class announced Feb. 6, led by five-star recruit Baker Steinkuhler. Surrounding Steinkuhler are (clockwise from lower left) Ricky Henry, Sean Fisher, Collins Okafor, John Levorson and Micah Kreikemeier. Cover photos courtesy of Rivals.com, *Huskers Illustrated*.com and the West Point News. Design by Scott Bruhn.

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# Huskers Illustrated

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A closer look at the athletes in the Class of 2008.

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## Ending Most Important

*The NU wrestling team's steady climb hasn't changed its approach*



**Terry DOUGLASS**

ONE MIGHT ASSUME a season that has already included a No. 2 national ranking, a second-place finish in the NWCA National Duals and a rare dual victory over Oklahoma State would have the Nebraska's wrestlers feeling pretty good about themselves.

Then realize, none of it matters.

Ask almost anyone closely associated with program, and you'll quickly learn that it's the closing stretch that will ultimately define the

Cornhuskers' season.

"It has been great so far, and we've done a lot of good things, but in this program, we tend to put a lot of weight on what happens at the end of the season," Nebraska coach Mark Manning said. "So in our eyes, things are going OK, but we're not going to be satisfied with anything yet."

Rather than linger in past glory, Nebraska 174-pounder Brandon Browne points to the Big 12 Conference Championships and NCAA Championships as the team's focus.

"At the beginning of every year, your main goal is to be Big 12 champs and hopefully then national champs," Browne said. "Everything up to this point has been great, but it doesn't really mean anything."

In that way, Manning said wrestling isn't unique.

"I'm sure the New England Patriots weren't pleased with the way their season turned out in the end," Manning said. "In basketball, you look at Memphis, and they've been ranked No. 1, but if they're not there at the end of the season, they're probably not going to be happy."

Nebraska, which opened the season ranked No. 14 in the country, has made a steady climb in the national polls. The Huskers' resume has been bolstered by becoming the second unseeded team in 19 years to reach the finals of the NWCA National Duals, along with the program's first dual win over Oklahoma State since 1993.

With victories over a Cowboys team that was ranked No. 2 on Jan. 20 and a then-No. 1 Penn State quad in the National Duals, the Huskers have thrust themselves near the top of the rankings.

"We tell our guys that we really want to embrace it," Manning said of Nebraska being highly ranked. "That means that you have to live up to the challenge each and every time you go out there."

"We don't really look at it as pressure, but just another thing that's going to motivate us to help us perform."

Browne said the high-profile status hasn't changed the Huskers' approach.

"We've known that we have a good team all year long," Brown said. "Honestly, we don't think of ourselves any differently now that we're ranked high than we did when we were 15th."

"It's a lot of fun, knowing that other teams are gunning for us. I think it's a good thing."

Manning said it's no secret why Nebraska has been successful so far.

"We've got just a great bunch of guys who go out and work hard each and every day and push each other," he said. "I think these guys genuinely like each other and get along well outside of wrestling. They do a lot together — they watched the Super Bowl and various bowl games together, they play cards together, and no matter what they do, it's always very competitive."

"That's what you want. As a coach, you like to have a group of guys who are competitive in everything they do because that just seems to carry over into wrestling."

Browne said the program's success is the result of hard work and the family-type atmosphere that has permeated the team. The junior from Plattsmouth credits Manning for bringing all of the elements together.

"I think a lot of it has to do with just the way he runs things," Browne said. "He just seems to always know exactly

what needs to be done. He considers when we're broken down and need to get rest, and when we need work, he pushes us hard."

"I hear about a lot of teams that they don't go full-out in practices during the season, but we're going live about every day."

Browne said Manning's approach is one of honesty, compassion and just the right amount of motivation. Plus, it's not all about wrestling with Manning.

"That's been the case with Coach Manning from day one," Browne said. "His main focus is on making us better in every aspect and not just preparing us for wrestling, but for life."

"He cares about athletics, but he doesn't just care about athletics. He's more worried about what you're going to be when you graduate."

Manning, who earned his 100th career dual coaching victory on Jan. 2 against Northern Colorado, makes his philosophies visible to everyone. In fact, they're actually posted on signs in the Nebraska wrestling facilities.

"The hope is that by the time they leave here, they're going to understand that these are the things that are not only going to help them in wrestling, but are also going to help them in a job and in life," said Manning, who has guided his teams to four top-15 national finishes in his first seven seasons at Nebraska. "To me, that's what it's all about — not just making guys better wrestlers, but you want to do the best you can to prepare a young man for life."

One of the philosophies Manning tries to impart upon his wrestlers is that you can never afford to take a day off. Whether it's in the classroom or on the mat, no slacking is allowed.

"If you've got high goals, you've got high demands," Manning said. "There's no other way to go if you're going to get where you want to be." ■



**Mark Manning earned his 100th dual coaching victory Jan. 2.**



## Learning Curve

*First-year pitching coach Newman likes potential of Nebraska's young staff*



**Curt McKEEVER**

NEBRASKA'S FIRST-YEAR pitching coach Eric Newman doesn't need to look at the Huskers' roster to know he's dealing with a new set of cards.

No matter how he shuffles guys around, he's still got a staff of 17 that includes 12 newcomers. And of the five returnees, right-handed senior Johnny Dorn is the only one with any real experience as a starter.

This is indeed a first for Newman, who built a reputation of developing extremely competitive units during his five seasons at Dallas Baptist, the final three of which he was the head coach.

He'll be calling on every bit of that experience, too, to help guide the Husker pitchers to success this season.

"I don't really know how to answer that question, because I don't know," Newman said when asked what he thinks he's inherited on the heels of NU losing six underclassmen pitchers and another recruit to the 2007 Major League Draft. "I'm very encouraged with how the guys worked in the fall, and how they're doing now, but I have no idea (how things will turn out)."

OK, maybe he's holding back a bit. Newman, after all uses the words "trustworthy" and "willing to adapt" and "refreshing" when talking about his new group.

He also knows — because NU returns six regular-position starters and because the schedule will be condensed — that his pitchers will be put under the microscope as Nebraska seeks its ninth berth in the NCAA Tournament in 10 seasons.

"I think that we are going to need to have nine or 10 guys pitching well for us to be successful as a staff, but I see that as a very legitimate possibility," Newman said.

In early February practices, Newman divided his pitchers into four random groups. And from that setup, he discovered "there are a lot of guys throwing the ball really well. A lot."

Senior catcher Mitch Abeita concurs with that opinion. But excuse Abeita if he feels the need to introduce himself when he makes visits to the mound early this season.

While the 31-game winner Dorn has a spot in the weekend rotation, three of the other five main candidates are newcomers and the other two — left-handed junior Dan Jennings and right-handed senior Thad Weber — each have just one career start.

"Of course, we hear all the time how young our staff is," said Matt Freeman, a right-handed freshman who led Elkhorn to the Nebraska Class A state title last spring. "All of us here are trying to follow these guys like Thad and Johnny and work as hard as we can."

Freeman, junior college product Aaron Pribanic and Arizona State transfer Joe Hatasaki are contending for the other weekend starting spots, and also will figure in as long relievers or mid-week starters.

All remind Nebraska's pitching coach of players he had at

Dallas Baptist who grew into major roles. Freeman, especially, makes Newman think of Randall Taylor, who came in as an unheralded recruit and left four years later having won 28 games for the Panthers. Taylor was drafted in the 23rd round by the Colorado Rockies.

"They even look alike. It's eerie," Newman said before noting other similarities between Taylor and Freeman. "Good arm, pretty athletic, knows how to pitch, very successful high school guys. Randall, as a freshman, I don't think threw a pitch over 88, but as a senior he was 92-94."

"Freeman — he's going to have a great career here."

Apparently, Pribanic, a 6-foot-4 right-hander who blossomed last season at Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College, and the 5-10 lefty Hatasaki have the same kind of potential.

Three years ago, the Plano, Texas, product Pribanic chose to redshirt and concentrate on his physical development. The move paid big dividends, as last season he went 6-1 with 64 strikeouts in 67 1/3 innings. What's more, he was hitting 92 to 96 mph on the radar in early February practices.

Hatasaki, meanwhile, was making a quick transition after transferring in between semesters. From Mountain View, Calif., he saw action in just four games at ASU last season, but is closer to regaining the form that led to him being named one of the nation's top 50 high school sophomores before needing reconstructive elbow surgery.

Nebraska got another between-semesters transfer in right-handed sophomore Erik Anderson, who came a year earlier than expected from Barton County (Kan.) Community College and is in line for a late-inning reliever's role. For Barton County last season, Anderson recorded seven saves and a 2.17 earned-run average while appearing in a school-record 27 games. He had 76 strikeouts in just 49 2/3 innings.

Left-handed junior Zach Herr also will start out being counted on for late-inning relief, while right-handed junior Erik Bird, who's throwing from a lower arm slot, figures to get calls in long relief and as a starter.

Maybe the Huskers don't have someone the likes of Joba Chamberlain, who took his untapped talent to Nebraska-Kearney before hitting it big at NU and then making the jump to the New York Yankees in one season. But they believe there's plenty — like unknown redshirt freshman Michael Nesseseth, who's hit 91 to 93 mph in practice — who will make their pitching coach wonder: Where'd this guy come from?

"We don't have a (dominant, hard-throwing) guy on this staff," Newman said, "but we have guys that as we stack them eight-nine-10 deep will be very good."

Sounds like Newman's going to enjoy shuffling this deck.

"He's been awesome," Freeman said. "He makes you work hard, but he's a fair guy. We're all getting a lot better." ■



**Erik Newman is Nebraska's new pitching coach.**

**Curt McKeever** is a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football, he is the primary beat writer for baseball. Curt can be reached at [cmckeever@journalstar.com](mailto:cmckeever@journalstar.com)



# Team A

***Pelini stresses  
that 'it's not  
about any  
individual guys'***

**By Mike Babcock**

**H**ad you closed your eyes and allowed your imagination to frame the news conference at which Bo Pelini announced his first recruiting class, you could have seen with your mind's eye how letter-of-intent-signing days once were at Nebraska.

Pelini dismissed outside rankings, with words repeated by Tom Osborne so many times during his 25 years as coach. "What becomes of this class, we'll find out a year from now, two years from now, three, four years down the road," Pelini said.

Osborne never paid attention to recruiting-class rankings. He and his staff relied on their own evaluations and sought athletes who would fit the culture — though the term "culture" wasn't part of the athletics lexicon when Osborne stepped aside following the 1997 season, with a third national championship in his final four seasons.

Osborne always talked about development and commitment and emphasized the importance of in-state athletes to the program's continued good health. And Pelini echoed those things during a half hour spent mostly responding to questions.

Successful recruiting requires a team effort, said Pelini, whose actions spoke even louder than his words. He brought all of his assistants to the news conference to answer recruiting questions. The atmosphere was relaxed, the way it used to be.

One questioner claimed Nebraska didn't have a "huge resume of established recruiters" but had done well nonetheless. "I don't put much stock in the recruiting resumes," Pelini said. "What does that really mean? I know that we have good, high-character gentlemen who



## **FEATURE STORY**

are out there recruiting and beating the bushes. They know talent.

"We're all on the same page of what we want to accomplish, and we have a tremendous product to sell. That's a great resume, and that's across the board on our staff. I'm proud of the guys I have, and I think the job they did speaks for itself."

Pelini and his staff signed 28 scholarship recruits — Mason Wald was added later to the list handed out at the



# pproach

"We feel we have talent and potential in the guys that are going to be on scholarship, but (also) there's a lot of talent and potential coming in that walk-on group."

— Bo Pelini



news conference — and supplemented with 30 walk-ons. The names of 18 walk-ons were released. The other 12 had yet to finish paperwork for admission to the university. "We're committed to getting the walk-on program back on its feet and becoming a big part of the future," said Pelini.

"We feel we have talent and potential in the guys that are going to be on scholarship, but (also) there's a lot of talent and potential coming in that walk-on group."

Baker Steinkuhler, the son of former Cornhusker All-American and Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award winner Dean Steinkuhler and the brother of Cornhusker defensive lineman Ty Steinkuhler, is the most publicized

member of the 2008 class.

Parade magazine named him the nation's top high school lineman, and he earned five stars from Rivals.com, the only Nebraska recruit to do so. Linebacker Will Compton and defensive back David Whitmore earned four-star rankings.

Pelini declined to speak about specific players, however. "No sense in singling kids out," he said. "Everybody knows about them. You can read about them."

"They're part of our program. They're part of the team, and that's how we're going to approach it. They know that. They signed on for that. They became part of the Nebraska football program. It's not about any individual guys. It's about the unit as a whole. When they signed on, they became part of our whole team. And that's special in itself."

Osborne's attitude was the same, although he typically talked about letter-of-intent signees. He always went through the entire list, each in turn, omitting no one. Recruiting coverage wasn't as extensive then as it is now, largely because of the Internet. Even though interest was comparable, most people were less informed about recruits.

Pelini's recruiting philosophy also echoes Osborne's.

"What I believe in and what the staff believes in is honesty," he said. "We're going to be honest with recruits. Like I said, we have a tremendous product to sell."

He paused to edit that comment. "I shouldn't say 'sell.' We have a tremendous product we can 'offer' kids, and we're going to be honest with our expectations," he said.

Recruits aren't promised anything. Once players are in the program, the relationship "is going to be built on trust," Pelini said. "So we want to make sure we get off on the right foot with them because if you promise things or you try and sell a bill of goods or try to give them something you're not going to be able to live up to in the future, then what? They come into your program and you lose that trust right off the bat."

"You might as well part ways at that point. We're not going to approach it that way. We want kids . . . who want to come to play for the University of Nebraska and have a strong feeling for it, who want to become part of our culture, part of our program within the standards we give them and want to play championship football."

Being part of the program "isn't for every kid," he said. "Kids we recruit and they go somewhere else, we say, 'God bless 'em.' At the end of the day, we're going to have kids that are passionate about the University of Nebraska and what we have going."



Only one athlete who committed to Pelini changed his mind, defensive tackle Eddie Brown — who signed with Texas A&M. However, as is to be expected after a coaching change, 14 athletes who made oral commitments to Bill Callahan de-committed. One of the 14, Josh Williams, still signed with the Cornhuskers. Seven signed with other Big 12 schools.

The de-commitments didn't concern Pelini. "That's for the recruiting services," he said. "We don't pay a whole heck of a lot of attention to that. Until they sign on signing day, you haven't gained or lost anybody until that fax comes across."

"That's just the nature of recruiting these days. We had a plan. We stuck with our plan and just kept working our butts off. And things turned out well for us."

The only junior college transfers among the 28, both of whom had committed to Callahan, are tight end Tyson Hetzer and offensive lineman Ricky Henry. Hetzer enrolled for second-semester classes and will participate in spring practice, along with incoming freshman quarterback Kody Spano. Henry and Steinkuhler are among four in the class listed as offensive linemen. Four are listed as linebackers. Five are listed as defensive backs. But particular positions weren't an emphasis because "we really don't know what our needs are at this point," Pelini said.

"We're still trying to associate ourselves with what we have and what we need."

"We wanted to get talented football players, guys that have potential to come in and play winning football. And we were able to accomplish that."

The most recruits, nine, come from Texas, followed by six from in the state, where the Cornhuskers' recruiting has to "start, begin and end," said Pelini.

Obviously, the majority of walk-ons will be in-state.



**Baker Steinkuhler is the highest-rated recruit in the class, with a five-star ranking by Rivals.com**

Based on evaluations and personal contact, the recruiting class has talent, potential and "want-to," according to Pelini. But "you don't know how they're going to respond to coaching," he said. "There's a tremendous amount of unknowns."

"That's part of the beauty of coaching. You have to get them, put them inside your culture and what you believe is important, try and guide them in the right direction and try and eke out as much of their potential as you possibly can."

It seemed like old times on letter-of-intent signing day.

"Everybody wants to talk about what the No. 1 recruiting class is," Pelini said. "They want to put numbers on it and talk about who had a good class and who didn't have a good class. It's hard to say. Talk to me two, three years down the road; I'll tell you how good of a class it was. And that's going to be across the board."

"What people want to rank you today or a week from now, it doesn't really make a difference to us. We feel good about the gentlemen we brought into our program. We feel like we had a successful day bringing potential, high-character kids and talent into the program. Now it's our job to go to work and develop that talent."

He was referring not only to the scholarship athletes but also the walk-ons.

Just like Osborne before him.

## DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

Recruiting success begins at home. Pelini made that clear. But the Cornhuskers will continue to look to Texas, which should come as no surprise. Nebraska has long recruited the Lone Star State. Its All-America list includes nine Texans, three of whom were honored twice.

Keyuo Craver, CB, Harleton (2001)  
 Aaron Taylor, C/OG, Wichita Falls (1996-97)  
 Aaron Graham, C, Denton (1995)  
 Travis Hill, OLB, Pearland (1992)  
 Kenny Walker, DL, Crane (1990)  
 Doug Glaser, OT, Mesquite (1989)  
 Broderick Thomas, OLB, Houston (1987-88)  
 Junior Miller, TE, Midland (1979)  
 Kelvin Clark, OT, Odessa (1978)

Three-time all-conference quarterback Turner Gill (Fort Worth) and school career-scoring leader Kris Brown (Southlake) are among other Cornhuskers from Texas.

Osborne maintained a recruiting presence in Texas from the time he succeeded Bob Devaney. All but three of Osborne's recruiting classes included at least one player from Texas, the most being seven in 1989. Defensive back John Reece (Houston) and kicker Byron Bennett (Rowlett) were the most prominent members of that class.

Over 25 years, Osborne pulled nearly 60 scholarship recruits out of Texas, with an average of about five per year from 1985 to 1989.

Callahan was successful in Texas a year ago, signing seven.

Tim Beck, the final assistant Pelini hired, spent six years



as a high school coach in Texas, bolstering Nebraska's presence there. Though arriving in early January, "he was a great resource for us," said Pelini. "But it was a group effort. Everything is."

Assistants Shawn Watson and Ted Gilmore, who were retained from Callahan's staff, also have solid recruiting connections in Texas, which "is going to be a primary area outside the state of Nebraska," Pelini said. "Our success there, hopefully it's a sign of things to come."

## NO QUICK FIXES

Junior college transfers have made a significant contribution to Cornhusker football over the years, going back to the late 1960s, when Osborne began recruiting southern California as a Devaney assistant. Bob Newton, an All-America offensive tackle on the 1970 national championship team, was a junior college transfer as were Dick Rupert, Carl Johnson and Bob Terrio, all of whom earned first-team all-conference recognition on the 1971 national championship team.

The leading rusher in school history, Mike Rozier, spent one season at Coffeyville, Kan., Community College before following through on a commitment he made to Nebraska as a high school senior in Camden, N.J. And Zac Taylor, the Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year, came to Nebraska from Wake Forest by way of Butler County (Kan.) Community College.

Demorrio Williams emerged as a dominant outside linebacker when Pelini was defensive coordinator in 2003, reminiscent of Terrell Farley in his first season, 1995.

But Nebraska's success has been built on a foundation of high school athletes, who are brought in and developed. Junior college transfers should be recruited to fill specific needs, and "we're not at that point right now in our program," said Pelini.

"We don't even know what we have on campus."

Callahan recruited 29 junior college players in four years, including 12 in 2005. Several besides Taylor made significant contributions, among them Maurice Purify, Carl Nicks, Steve Octavien, Zack Bowman, Ola Dagunduro, Frantz Hardy and Bryan Wilson.

In contrast to Callahan, Osborne recruited about 40 junior college players, total. And Pelini is following that lead.

"I believe there's no quick fixes in life," he said.

"You're going to get out of something what you put into it. You don't have anything unless you build a foundation. That's what we're trying to do. We need to first establish a foundation in our culture and how we're going to go about things, and then we're going to build on it the right way. We're not looking for the quick fix."

## COMING HOME

Initially, Ben Cotton committed to Iowa State. That stood to reason. He lived in Ames, Iowa, and his dad Barney was a Cyclones assistant coach. Then coach Dan McCarney was fired, and those on his staff weren't retained. As a result, the recruitment of the 6-foot-6, 230-pound tight end began anew, with Louisville, Wisconsin, Iowa and Kansas on his list.



Offensive line coach Barney Cotton's son Ben, a tight end from Ames, Iowa, was among the Nebraska signees.

Ben Cotton settled on Louisville, making an oral commitment.

Ben is a man of his word, Barney Cotton said. So when Pelini hired him as offensive line coach, his son faced a difficult situation. How to tell Louisville he had changed his mind.

"I said, 'I'll help you through this. This is a special deal,'" Barney said.

Ben's grandparents live in Omaha, and his dad, of course, played at Nebraska. Barney Cotton was a three-year letterman (1976-78), playing both offensive and defensive line. He also was a Cornhusker assistant for one season under coach Frank Solich in 2003.

Under the circumstances, Ben wouldn't be breaking his word, his dad told him. The Louisville coaches would understand. "Usually, Ben would call them (coaches) when he decided not to go to a school," said Barney. "But I said, 'I'll call (first).'"

The Louisville coaches said they would have done the same thing. And on the morning letters of intent could be signed, they called Ben to congratulate him.

They're "a classy bunch of guys," Barney said.

When Solich and his staff were let go, Barney Cotton never imagined he would have an opportunity to return to Nebraska. "Absolutely never," he said.

Even after Osborne became athletic director he never considered the possibility. "Probably the first time I even allowed myself to think of it was the first time Coach Osborne called and kind of welcomed me back in the family. He said, 'Well, I don't really know what's going on, but it sure would be nice to have you back on the staff here some day.' So then I'll admit it maybe crept into the back of my mind a little bit," said Cotton.

Then Pelini was hired, and Cotton had the opportunity to come home.

"You don't see that very often," he said, adding that he had been doubly blessed.

## WHATEVER IT TAKES

Compton was among those who wavered on his commitment to Nebraska after Callahan and his assistants



(except for Watson and Gilmore) were let go. Compton had connected with former linebackers coach and defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove.

Two weeks before letter-of-intent-signing day, after the defensive assistants all went to pay him a visit in Bonne Terre, Mo., he re-affirmed his commitment to Nebraska.

Cornhusker linebackers coach Mike Ekeler got a temporary tattoo that included Compton's name above the Blackshirts logo. By letter-of-intent-signing day, the tattoo was fading. When a television reporter asked to see what remained, Ekeler declined with a laugh.

"I don't want to show off my guns," he said. "I'm a married man."

## SEC COUNTRY

Six of Nebraska's scholarship recruits came from Southeastern Conference states, a reflection of Pelini's having spent the last three years at Louisiana State.

"You've got to recruit where you have ties. You've got to go where the good football players are, and it just so happens, coming from LSU, I knew some of the guys in the state of Louisiana," he said. "I was familiar with some of the different guys, and so were guys on our staff."

Ekeler and John Papuchis also were at LSU.

"A big part of recruiting is having established relationships and being able to build relationships," said Pelini. "That's why I feel so confident in the guys I have on this staff. They're great communicators and they're high-character. They're good people."

"When it's all said and done, high school coaches are going to feel good about sending their kids to play for these gentlemen the more they get to know them. It just so happens that those are some of the areas we established relationships outside the state of Nebraska."

A reporter suggested that recruiters could find speed in SEC country.

"Obviously, you want guys that can run," Pelini said. "But there are a lot of guys in the state of Nebraska that can run, and in the Midwest. I think that's a little bit overblown. People think you go down, all of a sudden you cross into Florida, and you can run." ■

## WHAT DO THEY THINK?

**Jeremy Crabtree, Rivals.com**

"Nebraska added a strong finish to an already impressive class. Though they only secured commitments from three players rated at four stars or higher, the Cornhuskers pulled in a great group of three-star players that have some superstar potential. Courtney Osborne and Steven Osborne have big frames into which they can grow. P.J. Smith of John Curtis High School in Louisiana could be a huge steal at safety. The Huskers were the beneficiaries of quarterback Kody Spano's de-commitment from Oklahoma State, and they were also able to convince running back Justin Rogers to change from his previous commitment to Auburn.

"All in all, after coming in and having little over a month to pull together a complete class, this was a great effort for Nebraska. You have to be very impressed with the job the coaches did. It's going to be fun to see what they can do with a full year under their belt."

**Sean Callahan, HuskersIllustrated.com**

"When you look at Bo Pelini's first recruiting class, I think the thing that really stands out is the overall depth from top to bottom. Pelini and his staff did an outstanding job of identifying talent down the stretch and they closed on nearly every prospect during the key recruiting month of January. It was also very evident that this staff has outstanding connections in Dallas with Tim Beck, and they even pulled some guys out of places like Louisiana, Ohio and Alabama — states NU doesn't traditionally sign prospects from."

**John Talman, HuskersIllustrated.com**

"With a losing record on the field and a coaching change off, things weren't looking good for recruiting after on top of all that a slew of numerous de-commitments took place as Bo Pelini was announced as the Huskers' new head coach.

"However, once the new staff was formed and they hit the road hard for several weeks leading up to Signing Day, the class turned out better than many actually expected. Not only did Nebraska fill needs on both sides of the ball, especially at positions such as wide receiver and in the secondary, but they put together a versatile class of prospects who could all figure in to multiple positions at the next level.

"Getting a midyear quarterback in Kody Spano, adding great athletes such as receiver Khiry Cooper, defensive back Alphonzo Dennard, and safety P.J. Smith late, and hanging on to previous commits such as Will Compton, Cameron Meredith, David Whitmore and Josh Williams equaled a very solid group. Like has been said several times over, this staff showed great work late in recruiting, tremendous connections to talent-rich areas of the country, and a new energy on the recruiting trail. It will be extremely interesting to watch what this staff can do with an entire year of recruiting as they put together the 2009 class."

## WALK-ONS ANNOUNCED ON SIGNING DAY

Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown	High School
Kenny Anderson	DE	6-2	235	Omaha, Neb.	Millard West HS
Damon Bechtold	TE	6-4	215	Omaha, Neb.	Westside HS
Jase Dean	FS	6-0	180	Bridgeport, Neb.	Bridgeport HS
Taylor Dixon	DB	5-11	170	Wauneta, Neb.	Wauneta-Palisade HS
Justin Jackson	DL	6-3	255	Roca, Neb.	Norris HS
Jordan Makovicka	RB	5-10	170	Ulysses, Neb.	East Butler HS
Matt Manninger	LB	6-1	225	Omaha, Neb.	Creighton Prep HS
Mychael McClure	LB	6-5	210	Wisner, Neb.	Wisner-Pilger HS
Colin McDermott	LB	6-2	225	Omaha, Neb.	Creighton Prep HS
Conor McDermott	DE	6-2	230	Omaha, Neb.	Creighton Prep HS
Sam Meginnis	LB	6-2	210	Lincoln, Neb.	Lincoln East HS
Josh Molek	DE	6-3	235	Omaha, Neb.	Skutt HS
Brent Moravec	FB/LB	6-0	180	Grand Island, Neb.	Central Catholic HS
David Pillen	FB/LB	5-11	230	Sugar Land, Texas	Stephen F. Austin HS
Zach Ruiz	QB/ATH	6-3	210	Beatrice, Neb.	Beatrice HS
Steve Spratte	WR	5-11	180	Waukesha, Wis.	Waukesha West HS
Graham Stoddard	LB	6-2	215	Lincoln, Neb.	Lincoln Southwest HS
Jeremy Wallace	RB	6-1	220	Omaha, Neb.	Bryan HS



# 2008

## NEBRASKA FOOTBALL SIGNEES

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown (High School/College)
Antonio Bell	WR	6-2	180	Daytona Beach, Fla. (Mainland HS)
Will Compton	LB	6-1	230	Bonne Terre, Mo. (North County HS)
Khiry Cooper	WR	6-2	180	Shreveport, La. (Calvary Baptist Academy)
Ben Cotton	TE	6-6	230	Ames, Iowa (Ames HS)
Alfonzo Dennard	DB	5-11	190	Rochelle, Ga. (Wilcox County HS)
Sean Fisher	LB	6-6	225	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North HS)
David Grant	OL	6-5	295	Killeen, Texas (Killeen HS)
Ricky Henry	OL	6-4	305	Omaha, Neb. (Burke HS/North Dakota State College of Science)
Tyson Hetzer*	TE	6-6	245	Redding, Calif. (Anderson/Citrus College)
Micah Kreikemeier	LB	6-3	210	West Point, Neb. (Central Catholic HS)
John Levorson	DB	6-3	190	Crete, Neb. (Crete HS)
Tim Marlowe	WR	5-10	160	Youngstown, Ohio (Cardinal Mooney HS)
Cameron Meredith	DL	6-4	225	Santa Ana, Calif. (Mater Dei HS)
Collins Okafor	RB	6-1	195	Omaha, Neb. (Westside HS)
Courtney Osborne	ATH	6-3	175	Garland, Texas (South Garland HS)
Steven Osborne	WR	6-4	185	Garland, Texas (South Garland HS)
Kyler Reed	HB	6-3	220	Shawnee, Kan. (St. Thomas Aquinas HS)
Justin Rogers	DB	5-11	180	Birmingham, Ala. (Vestavia Hills HS)
P.J. Smith	DB	6-2	205	River Ridge, La. (John Curtis HS)
Kody Spano**	QB	6-2	205	Stephenville, Texas (Stephenville HS)
Baker Steinkuhler	OL	6-6	290	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest HS)
Brandon Thompson	OL	6-6	295	The Woodlands, Texas (The Woodlands HS)
Quentin Toailoa	DL	6-4	300	Highland, Calif. (Redlands East Valley HS)
Mason Wald	DB	5-11	205	Birmingham, Ala. (Vestavia Hills HS)
Lester Ward	RB	6-3	215	Brenham, Texas (Brenham HS)
Alonzo Whaley	LB/FB	6-1	225	Madisonville, Texas (Madisonville HS)
David Whitmore	DB	6-2	185	Port Arthur, Texas (Memorial HS)
Josh Williams	DE	6-4	225	Denton, Texas (Ryan HS)

\*Indicates mid-year signee

\*\*Enrolled at Nebraska in January

**Capsules compiled by Sean Stevens, Rick Shaw, Brian Hill & NU Sports Information**  
**Photos: HuskersIllustrated.com, Rivals.com, West Point News, Killeen Daily Herald,**  
**North Dakota State College of Science**



## ANTONIO BELL



**Wide receiver**  
**Daytona Beach, Fla.**  
**(Mainland)**  
**6-2/180/4.5**



**BIO:** Antonio Bell joins the Huskers after a highly productive prep career at Mainland High School in Daytona Beach, Fla. Bell's signing gives Nebraska at least one signee from Florida in each of the past seven years. A starter since his freshman season, Bell caught 45 passes for 776 yards and nine touchdowns as a senior. That performance earned him first-team all-area honors and second-team class 5A all-state accolades from the Florida Sportswriters Association. As a junior, he caught 42 passes for 625 yards and four touchdowns. Bell accounted for 500 receiving yards as a sophomore in 2005. Bell also competes in the high jump and triple jump for the Mainland track team. Bell comes from the same high school that produced current Husker offensive lineman Cruz Barrett. Bell chose Nebraska over offers from West Virginia, South Carolina and Tennessee.

**WHY ANTONIO CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It was everything — the coaches, the facilities and the people. The people knew everybody. A lot of people knew who I was. Like when I was in the mall, a couple of people walked by and told me I needed to come to Nebraska. I was surprised that they knew who I was."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Antonio is around 6-2, 180, very athletic, good ball skills, nice size and length to him. He can run and played in a heck of a program. He was a four-year starter at Mainland, and that's a tremendous program with a lot of tradition so he's obviously played a lot of football. We feel really good about him. He's a guy who can help in a number of ways. He can play inside or outside. I always think from a defensive standpoint that he'd be a heck of a corner, so they'll be fighting me off to keep him over there on offense."

**MAINLAND COACH JOHN MARONTO:** "He has great hands, so he's a possession, short-pass guy. But his ability to go deep makes Antonio one of those guys who can do it all."

## WILL COMPTON



**Linebacker**  
**Bonne Terre, Mo.**  
**(North County)**  
**6-2/230/4.5**



**BIO:** Will Compton is one of four linebacker prospects in Nebraska's 2008 signing class. Compton joins the Nebraska program from North County High School where he starred on both sides of the football. Compton's signing marks the fifth straight year Nebraska has signed at least one player from the state of Missouri. Compton is a physical player who has a nose for the football. During his senior season, Compton recorded 107 tackles, including 16 tackles for loss, four sacks and two interceptions, while causing a fumble and recovering another. On offense, accounting for approximately 500 rushing yards, 1,000 all-purpose yards and 14 touchdowns. His play as a senior earned Compton first-team all-state honors from the Missouri Sportswriters and Broadcasters Association. Compton also showcased his outstanding ability on both sides of the ball during his junior season, making 71 tackles, 13 tackles for loss and an interception on defense. On offense, he rushed for 455 yards, while catching 51 passes for 855 yards. Compton is ranked as the No. 3 overall prospect in Missouri by Rivals.com and one of the top 40 "athletes" in the country by the recruiting service. Compton chose Nebraska over Missouri and Illinois.

**WHY WILL CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "This is just the one I feel comfortable with. I cannot pass up a chance to play under Bo Pelini."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "We think he's extremely talented and tough. He shows great leadership ability, comes from a great family with all of the right values, and that's how he plays football. He approaches the game the right way. He's physical and he's tough, he can run sideline to sideline and can really play any of the three spots that we line up at the linebacker position."

**NORTH COUNTY COACH DAVID LEEDS:** "I've had some pretty good athletes over the years, guys with natural ability and speed and all that kind of stuff. But Will's by far the hardest worker of the bunch. He has the whole thing."



## KHIRY COOPER



**Wide Receiver**  
**Shreveport, La.**  
**(Calvary Baptist**  
**Academy)**  
**6-2/180/4.5**



**BIO:** Khiry Cooper will attempt to be a two-sport athlete at NU, playing both football and baseball. He held scholarship offers from Michigan and Arkansas among his options. Cooper followed up a junior season where he caught 50 passes for 750 yards and 15 touchdowns by catching 60 balls for 1,037 yards and 16 touchdowns as a senior. He helped his team to a berth in the state semifinals in Louisiana's class 2A. Rivals.com ranks Cooper as a three-star prospect and the No. 30 player in the state overall. Cooper was named first-team all-state by the Louisiana Football Coaches Association in class 2A and was a member of the New Orleans Times-Picayune Blue Chip list.

**WHY KHIRY CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I just felt it was the place for me. I thought it was a great overall place with a lot of good opportunities. I also really like the offense they run. It was just perfect and the place that God wants me to be."

**RIVALS.COM'S JEREMY CRABTREE:** "If I had to pick one guy on the offensive side of the ball who is a steal, Cooper would be it. They did a great job of identifying him late. Obviously Bo knew about him when he was in Louisiana. This kid has a ton of potential. I think this guy might be a big steal for the Huskers."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Khiry is a tremendous football player, good athlete, has excellent ball skills, and is a multi-sport athlete. He's a heck of a baseball player. He's probably going to play both here at Nebraska. He's a young man who I got to know when I was at LSU. He came to some of our 7-on-7 camps and just stood out every time he was on the field. I'm excited to coach him. He's a tremendous young man from a tremendous family, and I expect big things out of him in the future."

**CALVARY ACADEMY COACH DOUG PEDERSON:** "Are there guys out there who are faster? Yeah. But what you're going to see is discipline in how he runs his routes and reads coverages."

## BEN COTTON



**Tight End**  
**Ames,**  
**Iowa**  
**6-6/217/4.97**



**BIO:** Ben Cotton, the son of NU associate head coach/offensive line coach Barney Cotton, originally committed to Louisville in June of 2007. When his father was hired to coach the offensive line at Nebraska he quickly changed his mind. As a senior, Cotton helped Ames to a 5-4 record with 44 catches for 639 yards and four touchdowns. Cotton was named to the Des Moines Register Elite All-State Team as well as first-team all-state in Iowa's largest class (4A). Rivals.com rated Cotton with three stars, the No. 2 player in Iowa and the No. 25-ranked tight end nationally. Cotton chose Nebraska over Louisville, Iowa, Kansas and Wisconsin.

**WHY BEN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I always had it in my mind to follow my father's footsteps. I knew Coach (Bo) Pelini and all the guys he would be coaching with, they would be very family oriented, and they've got things in line. I had found a great place with Louisville. I couldn't go wrong with them, but they understand the opportunity to be with family. They agree with me that it's a once in a lifetime thing."

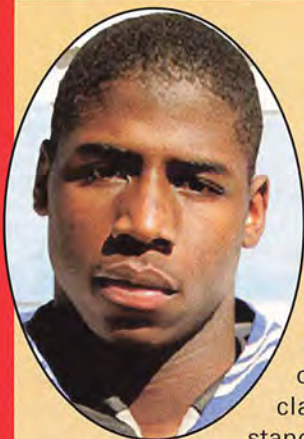
**RIVALS.COM'S JEREMY CRABTREE:** "He's going to be a big-time weapon with his height. He needs to fill out just a little bit and add a little more strength, but with his height they're going to be able to throw fade routes. That's something that's become a big weapon in college football today."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "He's tall with length and hands. He's a multi-sport athlete. He's a physical football player. He looks like a wideout at times — that's the type of athleticism he brings to the table. He's going to be a big, powerful young man in the future, but one that will be able to keep his athleticism and speed. He's about all of the right things."

**AMES COACH BRUCE VERTANEN:** "He is a talented tight end with a good combination of blocking and receiving skills, which is just what you want out of that position. He is a tireless worker."



## ALFONZO DENNARD



**Defensive Back**  
**Rochelle, Ga.**  
**(Wilcox County)**  
**5-10/190/4.4**



**BIO:** Alfonzo Dennard was one of the final pieces of Nebraska's 2008 signing class. Dennard is an outstanding athlete who excelled on both sides of the ball. Dennard is one of five players expected to begin their NU careers in the secondary. He is the first scholarship player from Georgia since current New England Patriot Le Kevin Smith joined the Huskers in 2001. In his senior season, Dennard played a leading role in helping North Wilcox and Coach Mark Ledford to a 13-2 record and state runner-up finish in Class A. Dennard lined up at cornerback on defense and made 53 tackles, while picking off five passes. Offensively, Dennard caught 39 passes for 780 yards and scored 14 touchdowns. Dennard also used his speed to help Wilcox County on special teams, returning two kickoffs and one punt for touchdowns. Dennard also piled up big numbers as a junior. He caught 45 passes for 840 yards and 12 touchdowns, while rushing 24 times for 240 yards and another six touchdowns. On defense, Dennard made 60 tackles and six interceptions. He is ranked as one of the nation's top 25 cornerbacks by Rivals.com and is listed among the top 40 overall prospects in Georgia. Dennard chose Nebraska over North Carolina and Troy.

**WHY ALFONZO CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I liked the coaching staff. I liked Coach (Bo) Pelini. I liked Memorial Stadium."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Alfonzo is very athletic and extremely explosive with tremendous jumping ability. He committed here to Nebraska without even taking an official visit, mainly because he didn't want to let his basketball team down and miss a couple of games because they're counting on him. It just goes to show you the type of kid he is."

**WILCOX COUNTY COACH MARK LEDFORD:** "He's a tremendous football player, a great athlete. He's a kid that has played just about every position on the field for us. I think he's going to be a big surprise for a lot of people."

## SEAN FISHER



**Linebacker**  
**Omaha, Neb.**  
**(Millard North)**  
**6-6/225/4.6**



**BIO:** Sean Fisher made an oral commitment to Nebraska in mid-June after considering offers from over 15 Division I schools such as Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Iowa and Arkansas. Fisher helped lead Millard North to the Nebraska Class A state championship game, where he rushed for nearly 200 yards and two touchdowns in a losing effort. On his way to being named honorary co-captain of both the Omaha World Herald's All-Nebraska and Lincoln Journal-Star's Super-State teams, Fisher was the Mustangs' second-leading tackler and third-leading rusher with 640 yards. He led the team in receiving and kick return yards. Rivals.com rates Fisher with three stars and as the No. 3 player in Nebraska. He is also listed as the No. 41-ranked outside linebacker nationally.

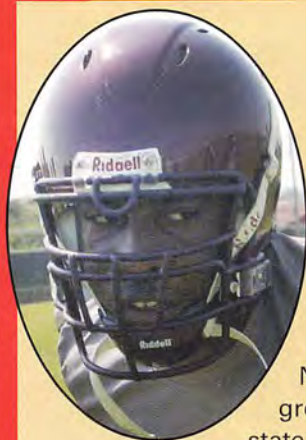
**WHY SEAN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "That is definitely where I want to go to school. It has been a dream for a long time. I know, personally, how I feel about it. This staff just brings a level of intensity that I just didn't see from the last (staff). They just seem extremely excited about being here and getting the program back on track."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "For a young man that size, he has tremendous athleticism. He can run, he has great hips and feet and can really play a number of different positions. The key with Sean is how big he gets once he gets in the weight program and starts developing even more physically. He's a tremendous football player — one that can help us in so many ways. At the end of the day, how big he gets is going to determine where he plays, but when you have that type of athleticism, you know he's going to be on the field someplace. He's tough and comes from a great program and was coached extremely well in high school."

**MILLARD NORTH COACH FRED PETITO:** "He likes the way Nebraska would use him in their defense. He wants to play in space and he likes being a safety."



## DAVID GRANT



**Offensive Lineman**  
**Killeen,**  
**Texas**  
**6-6/295/5.0**



**BIO:** Offensive lineman David Grant is part of Nebraska's largest-ever group of recruits from the state of Texas. Grant is one of nine Texans in the 2008 Husker class and one of four offensive line prospects to sign with Nebraska. Grant is a relative newcomer to the game of football, playing just two seasons of organized action after moving from New York City. Grant has honed his skills enough to earn all-district honors and second-team Class 4A all-state honors from the Texas Sportswriters Association. Grant's play on the offensive line helped Killeen High and coach Sam Jones to a 6-4 record in 2007. Grant was named one of the top 100 players in the state of Texas by Rivals.com, while also being recognized as one of the top 60 offensive tackles in the nation. Grant chose Nebraska over Baylor, Iowa State, Texas Tech, Oklahoma State and Houston.

**WHY DAVID CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "The reason I picked Nebraska is that they were one of the first to offer me back in the summer. They're a great school at putting people to the next level, and that's eventually where I want to be."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "David is big and long, can really move his feet, and can really run for somebody his size. You watch him get around and pull and be able to attack people in space — that's not something you can teach. He's born with great athleticism. He's a good kid, and the sky's the limit. He can be a great player. He needs to develop physically and get in the weight room to put on more size up top. You can't teach the feet and athleticism that he brings to the table. Obviously, we're excited about David. He's doing to be a heck of a player for us. You have to be able to move your feet these days with the athleticism people put on the defensive side of the ball."

**KILLEEN COACH SAM JONES:** "Get him to the training table and in the weight room, the sky is really the limit."

## RICKY HENRY



**Offensive Line**  
**Omaha, Neb. (Burke/**  
**N. Dakota State**  
**College of Science)**  
**6-4/305/5.2**



**BIO:** Offensive lineman Ricky Henry is one of six Nebraska natives in the 2008 signing class, including three players from Omaha. Henry originally signed with Nebraska in 2006, but has spent the past two seasons at the North Dakota State College of Science, where he was a standout on the offensive line. Henry has started every game at right guard the past two seasons. In 2007, Henry earned first-team all-region honors. Henry attended Omaha Burke High School, where he was a two-time first-team Class A all-state pick. In 2005, Henry was named to the Omaha World-Herald's All-Nebraska team and the Lincoln Journal Star's Super-State squad. Henry made his biggest mark on defense in high school with 84 tackles, including 27 tackles for loss as a senior, and another 107 tackles during his junior season. Henry also starred on the wrestling mat in high school, winning the Class A state heavy-weight title as a senior, after earning runner-up honors in his junior season. Henry is the first Husker scholarship recruit from Omaha Burke since Adam Julch and Aaron Wills signed with the Huskers in 1995. Henry will have three years to complete two seasons of eligibility at Nebraska. In addition to Nebraska, Henry also received offers from Colorado and Houston.

**WHY RICKY CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I have been a fan forever. I dreamed to play at Nebraska."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Very physical, very tough young man who plays extremely hard. He plays with the kind of passion that we look for in our players. He's going to bring a physical, tough presence to our offensive line. That's something that I know Coach (Barney) Cotton and Coach (Shawn) Watson want. We want to be known as a physical football team. We want to be the most physical offensive line in the conference, and bringing in a gentleman like this will help lead us in that direction. He is a tough guy and really gets after it on the field. You've got to be not only physically tough, but also mentally tough to be a wrestler, and he's shown that and competed at a high level."



## TYSON HETZER



**Tight End**  
**Redding, Calif.**  
**(Anderson/Citrus**  
**College)**  
**6-6/245/4.75**



**BIO:** Tight end Tyson Hetzer is one of two members of the 2008 Nebraska recruiting class who joined the

program in January. Hetzer comes to the Huskers after playing the 2007 season at Citrus College in Glendora, Calif. He has two seasons of eligibility remaining at Nebraska. At 6-6 and 245 pounds, Hetzer will provide outstanding size at the tight end position. In 2007, Hetzer caught 13 passes for 152 yards and a touchdown for a 6-5 Citrus College team. Hetzer also played a key role as a blocker. He is ranked among the top 100 junior-college prospects according to Rivals.com. Hetzer began his college career at Shasta (Calif.) College in 2005-06, where he played on the basketball team and helped the squad to a 21-11 record. Following the season he transferred to Division II North Alabama, hoping to play football, but after one semester he transferred to Citrus College. Hetzer had an outstanding two-sport high school career at Anderson High School. Tyson played two seasons of varsity football, lining up at wide receiver, tight end, defensive end and linebacker, while also handling punting duties. On the hardwood, Hetzer was twice named Anderson's Most Valuable Player. Hetzer also received offers from Louisville, Kansas State, Arizona State and Utah State.

**WHY TYSON CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I realized there couldn't be a better situation for me. It's not every day a school like Nebraska wants you as bad as they do."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Tyson's two for two, so we want to speed up his development. Obviously, if you bring in a guy with two years of eligibility left, they need to be able to come in and play and contribute right away. He's very athletic and a little big bigger than our other tight end. He's two years removed from high school, so from that standpoint he should be a little more 'game ready' than most freshmen or most first year guys. We're excited about him. He's athletic, he can catch and he just needs to show the ability to be physical and block."

## MICAH KREIKEMEIER



**Linebacker**  
**West Point, Neb.**  
**(Central Catholic)**  
**6-3/210/4.8**



**BIO:** Micah Kreikemeier was the first recruit to receive a scholarship offer — from Tom Osborne — after Bo Pelini was named Nebraska

head coach, and the first player from West Point Central Catholic to receive an NU offer since Tom Ridder in 1974. He then became the first oral commitment of Pelini's NU coaching career. Kreikemeier's father Keith is a former Husker, as is his high school coach Dave Ridder. He put up 125 total tackles, three sacks, two fumble recoveries, and one interception from his outside linebacker spot while also playing on special teams. On offense, Kreikemeier had 307 yards receiving and two touchdowns as a tight end in a run-based offense. He also scored four rushing touchdowns as a short-yardage back. Kreikemeier earned honorable-mention all-state honors in Nebraska's class C-2.

**WHY MICAH CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I had to ask him right away if it was a full ride, and he said 'yeah, that's all we offer.' When I hung up the phone with him, I'm not even sure if I said yes, but yes I plan on going there. It's pretty hard to say no to Tom Osborne."

**HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM'S SEAN CALLAHAN:** "He runs really well for a 6-foot-3 guy. This guy has a lot of upside."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "How big Micah is going to get I don't know, but Micah is a tremendous football player. He can run and hit and do a lot of different things. He was used a lot of different ways in high school and had tremendous success. He'll be a fun guy to watch. He's tough, and he plays a physical brand of football."

**WEST POINT CC COACH DAVE RIDDER:** "I don't care if it's the first quarter or the fourth quarter; he plays hard the whole time. He gets off blocks real good, and he also blocked four punts for us this year. Teams would run away from him, so he was a real presence on the field. I've said all along he's a Division I guy just based on his frame and potential."



## JOHN LEVORSON



**Defensive Back**  
**Crete,**  
**Neb.**  
**6-3/190/4.55**



**BIO:** John Levorson was named co-captain of both the Omaha World Herald's all-Nebraska and Lincoln Journal-Star's Super-State

teams after leading Crete to consecutive Class B state titles from his quarterback position. Levorson finished his high school career with 2,604 yards rushing and 3,164 yards passing for 59 total touchdowns. Levorson chose Nebraska early in the summer over offers from Northwestern, Ohio and Wyoming and had interest from Kansas, Kansas State, and Iowa State. Also a standout on the basketball court and the track, Levorson was ranked by Rivals.com with three stars as the No. 87 athlete nationally. He was also the No. 6-ranked player in Nebraska, according to Rivals.

**WHY JOHN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I don't know what to say, but it is Nebraska — my home state and a good school . . . playing for my home state and it has a little more meaning. I can tell that (Coach Pelini) knows exactly what he wants to happen (at Nebraska). He has a great vision."

**RIVALS.COM'S JEREMY CRABTREE:** "On senior film, he was incredible. He does everything that you want. He's just a great athlete who makes plays all over the field!"

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "He's very, very athletic with great size and good ball skills. He had success on both sides of the football and is also an excellent basketball player. He can really help us in a lot of different areas. We're really excited about the prospects for him, because he hasn't even tapped his potential yet and we know that he has a tremendous amount of potential and the 'want' to get there."

**CRETE HEAD COACH CHUCK MCGINNIS:** "When you think about Nebraska football, you think about guys like him. He would play safety, receiver, anywhere. If they asked him to play quarterback, he would play quarterback. He'll go down on kickoffs. It's kind of what that program is built on. He fits the mold."

## TIM MARLOWE



**Wide Receiver**  
**Youngstown, Ohio**  
**(Cardinal Mooney)**  
**5-10/160/4.5**



**BIO:** Tim Marlowe was one of the final additions to the recruiting class. He is a quick and explosive athlete. Marlowe will begin his NU

career at receiver, part of a talented four-player group at the wideout spot. Marlowe showed his versatility last season as a senior at Cardinal Mooney High School (Bo Pelini's alma mater), beginning the season at receiver, before being pressed into service at quarterback and leading his team to the state championship game. He ran for almost 300 yards on 42 carries and scored four touchdowns. He also caught nine passes for 216 yards and three more touchdowns. On defense, he had 36 tackles, led his team in pass deflections with 32 and in interceptions with five. His play helped Cardinal Mooney and Coach P.J. Fecko to a 14-1 record and a Division IV state runner-up finish. Marlowe was also a two-way standout for Cardinal Mooney as a junior, helping the Cardinals to a 15-0 record and a Division IV state title.

**WHY TIM CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It is a great place and a great program."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "I've known Tim for a long time and known his family for awhile. He's not a real big kid, but he's extremely fast and athletic. He played on both sides of the ball at Mooney. He has very good speed, very good quickness, is extremely tough. He was a wide receiver, and their quarterback who was committed to Notre Dame went down a couple of games into the year, and Tim moved to quarterback and led them to the state finals and really hadn't played much quarterback. It just goes to show you the type of athlete you're talking about. He has good ball skills, excellent toughness, and will run through a wall to win a football game. He's the kind of young man we want to bring into our program. He plays an exciting brand of football."

**CARDINAL MOONEY COACH P.J. FECKO:** "He was the fastest guy on our team, but he's also got a feel for the game. His knowledge of football allowed him to do a lot of things."



## CAMERON MEREDITH



**Defensive Line**  
**Santa Ana, Calif.**  
**(Mater Dei)**  
**6-4/225/4.6**



**BIO:** Defensive end recruit Cameron Meredith was named the Defensive MVP of the Trinity League — generally regarded as one of

the most competitive leagues in

the state of California — and also was named all-C.I.F. Pac-5 Division. A three-year starter at tradition-rich Mater Dei high school, Meredith played in only seven games because of injury, yet managed to record 65 unassisted tackles, 27 assists, 7.5 sacks, nine quarterback hurries, two caused fumbles and one fumble recovery. Meredith ranked as Rivals.com's No. 13 weakside defensive end nationally and the No. 63 player in California. He chose NU over schools such as Oklahoma, Oregon, Colorado, Washington and Arizona State.

**WHY CAMERON CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "When it came down to a final decision, the fact was that I couldn't pass up the opportunity to play at Nebraska because of the tradition and the legacy. Plus, I really do believe that in the next few years, Nebraska is going to be right up there fighting for the national championship. These coaches are really good, and you don't need a crystal ball to say that. Just look at the statistics."

**HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM'S SEAN CALLAHAN:** "He comes from one of the best high schools in California, in Mater Dei, that has produced players like Matt Leinert and Colt Brennan. He's going to come in as a guy ready to play. He had a lot of offers from around the country."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Cameron has nice size and he has a lot of upside to him. He's very athletic for his size and he can really run, but also plays physical at the point of attack. He has played in a number of big football games. (Mater Dei) is a very high-tradition program, and he understands how to play winning football. I think Cameron is going to be a heck of a player for us."

**MATER DEI COACH BRUCE ROLLINSON:** "Cameron is one of the fastest big men we have ever had. He's a feature player, and he determines a lot of how we scheme on defense."

## COLLINS OKAFOR



**Running Back**  
**Omaha, Neb.**  
**(Westside)**  
**6-1/195/4.54**



**BIO:** Collins Okafor was initially the second commitment to the Huskers' 2008 class, making his pledge in October of 2006.

When the coaching changes came down Okafor wobbled slightly, taking visits to Iowa and Stanford. In the end Rivals.com's No. 27-ranked running back stuck with the Huskers. Okafor ran for more than 1,500 yards, at a clip of 7.4 yards per carry on his way to being recognized as first-team Omaha World Herald All-Nebraska and first-team Lincoln Journal-Star Super-State. Rivals.com lists Okafor as a three-star recruit and the No. 4 player in Nebraska.

**WHY COLLINS CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It was a hard decision to make. When I sat down with Coach (Bo) Pelini, he wasn't afraid to talk to me like it was the first day of practice. That was impressive. As a defensive coach, he pretty much laid it out there. He told me if you want to de-commit, de-commit now. I was like 'wow, as a head coach, that's saying a lot.' He was honest. He's never had a losing record, and he's a Nebraska guy."

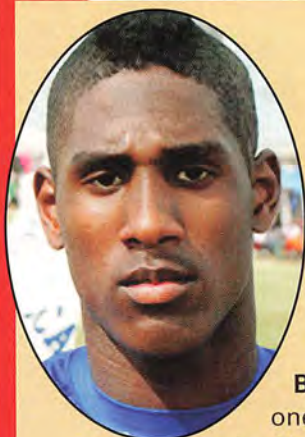
**HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM'S SEAN CALLAHAN:** "This is a guy who has so much potential. He didn't become the starter at Westside until midway through his junior season, and he's really just blown up ever since they gave him the ball that year."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "He has size, great speed and acceleration. He brings toughness to the table and will run physical. He can run inside the tackles or outside. He will play a physical brand of football, but also run by people and hit the home run. He has a lot of versatility to him, nice size and tremendous work ethic. He's also a good student"

**WESTSIDE COACH MARTY KAUFMAN:** "It's his size and strength. He has that combination of being a power runner and also an explosive runner. He's a long strider, but he can get to the hole fast. He either explodes through a hole and runs someone over, or he just flies around them."



## COURTNEY OSBORNE



**Athlete  
Garland,  
Texas  
(South  
Garland)  
6-3/175/4.5**



**BIO:** Courtney Osborne is one of nine Texas natives in Nebraska's signing class, representing the Huskers' largest ever recruiting harvest from the Lone Star State. Osborne joins his twin brother, Steven, in the class, marking the second set of twins to sign with Nebraska. They join the Bullocks brothers, who signed in 2001. A versatile performer, Courtney was recruited by the Huskers as an athlete who could play a number of positions. Osborne made his biggest impact on defense for South Garland High School and coach Mickey Moss. He also excelled on the special teams units, where he utilized his hard-hitting style. The play of the Osbornes helped a talented South Garland squad to a 10-2 record and a district title in 2007. Courtney was listed as the No. 50 prospect on the Dallas Morning News' Area 100 list and a three-star prospect by Rivals.com. In addition to Nebraska, Osborne also received scholarship offers from UNLV and Kansas.

**WHY COURTNEY CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It was everything — the school, the academics. That was probably my favorite part — my mom's, too."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Courtney is very similar to his brother with his size and stature. He's a very physical football player that really has a nose for the ball. He's going to be a young man that can play in a number of different areas of our defense."

**SOUTH GARLAND COACH MICKEY MOSS:** "Courtney, he's a hitter, a striker, he's a sure-tackler, and he may be the fastest kid we had on defense. When it came to field speed, he blew everybody away. I think he could play multiple positions, but I think his strengths are defense. I mean he's so aggressive and physical. He runs and tackles so well."

## STEVEN OSBORNE



**Athlete  
Garland,  
Texas  
(South  
Garland)  
6-4/185/4.5**



**BIO:** Wide receiver Steven Osborne joins his twin brother Courtney in the Huskers' 2008 signing class. Steven and Courtney are just the second set of twins ever to sign with the Huskers, joining Josh and Daniel Bullocks, who signed with the Huskers in 2001 and who both are currently in the NFL. Osborne brings good size and speed to Nebraska's receiving corps as well as a reputation for being a tenacious blocker. Osborne provided a big receiving target for South Garland High and coach Mickey Moss, helping the school to a district title and a 10-2 record. As a senior, he caught 38 passes for 601 yards and 10 touchdowns. His play did not go unnoticed as the Dallas Morning News ranked him as the No. 49 prospect on its Area 100 list. He was listed as a three-star prospect by Rivals.com. In addition to Nebraska, Steven also visited UNLV, and received scholarship offers from Utah, Kansas and SMU among others.

**WHY STEVEN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It's the people, the program, Coach Pelini. They all live for football."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Steven has good length and size and also good speed and quickness. He has excellent hands and is really going to be a playmaker for us. Along with his twin brother, they are really going to bring a charisma to the program. Very good kids."

**SOUTH GARLAND COACH MICKEY MOSS:** "The thing about Steven is, he doesn't go out to just get a block — he's going out to destroy them. He's a kid who loves blocking, is aggressive and physical, but at the same time he's deceptively fast because he's so long. I think he's going to be huge one day. He has a great frame on him. I'm looking at him being a kid that's easily going to be 225 one day."



## KYLER REED



**H-Back**  
**Shawnee, Kan.**  
**(St. Thomas Aquinas)**  
**6-3/220/4.5**



**BIO:** Kyler Reed played multiple roles for St. Thomas Aquinas his senior year, rushing for approximately 350 yards and seven touchdowns while garnering another 500 yards receiving for seven scores. He even passed for a touchdown on his way to being named class 5A first team as a receiver by both the Kansas High School Coaches Association and the Topeka Capital Journal. The Kansas City Star also awarded Reed honorable mention all-metro honors. Rivals.com ranked Reed with three stars and as the fifth best player in Kansas and No. 68 "athlete" nationally.

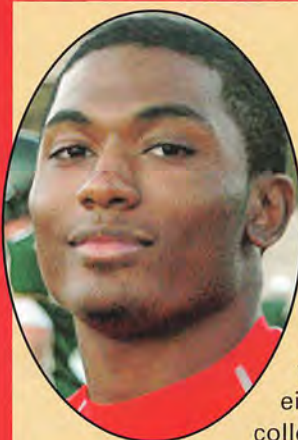
**WHY KYLER CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "They have always been . . . before they even offered me . . . they have been the team I have been rooting for since I was five or whatever. I kind of knew I was going to go there, but I wanted to see if I truly liked it."

**HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM'S SEAN CALLAHAN:** "This guy is a great leader. He's an intense, no-nonsense kind of guy."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "As you watch his tape, the thing that I think will stand out is that he's physical at the point of attack, and he's very explosive. He's very, very athletic, has nice size, and that provides versatility. He can do a lot of different things for your football team. Not only can he block, but he can catch the ball and he can run. He has nice size and length, so he could really help you on either side of the football. We see him becoming an H-back type of guy, but the sky is the limit of what he can become in the future. He's a multiple-sport athlete, so once he gets locked into a weight program with coach Dobson, he's going to be a fun guy to watch develop."

**AQUINAS COACH KEVIN KOPECKY:** "I joke with people that he's the kind of player you build in a video game. Put a playmaker like that out in space and just throw him a short pass, and he can make somebody miss. He'll take a short 5-yard pass and turn it into a big gain."

## JUSTIN ROGERS



**Running Back**  
**Birmingham, Ala.**  
**(Vestavia Hills)**  
**5-11/180/4.4**



**BIO:** Justin Rogers is a talented athlete who has the ability to excel on either side of the ball at the collegiate level. The 5-11, 180-pound Rogers made his biggest impact as a running back at Birmingham's Vestavia Hills High School, but he will likely begin his Husker career in the secondary. Rogers is the first scholarship player from the state of Alabama since offensive lineman Brett Byford joined the Husker program in 2003. Rogers racked up huge rushing numbers for coach Buddy Anderson, helping his school to two straight state semifinal trips. In 2007, Rogers helped Vestavia Hills to an 11-3 record by rushing for 2,110 yards and 28 touchdowns. Rogers' play as a senior earned him first-team Class 6A all-state honors as a running back, and he also played in the Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Classic. Rogers' rushing numbers as a senior were nearly identical to his junior season when he totaled 2,100 yards and 31 touchdowns on the ground. Rogers boasts great speed, having won the 2007 Class 6A indoor 55-meter dash title with a time of 6.57 seconds. Rogers is ranked among the top 30 players in Alabama and among the top 50 running back prospects in the country by Rivals.com. Rogers chose Nebraska over Auburn, Clemson, UCLA and Kentucky.

**WHY JUSTIN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "The biggest positive for me was probably when I walked on the football field during my visit. I just felt that was a place I should be. Also, I enjoyed talking to Coach Pelini. He told me some stuff that was good to hear, but I felt he was telling me the truth. All coaches will tell you things to try and get you to come to their schools, but with him, I really believed what he was saying."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Justin is very fast, and he played in a heck of a program down in Alabama. He's a very good athlete and has great burst. He can go. We originally recruited him as a cornerback, but my offensive coaches have been in my ear trying to get him on that side of the ball."



## **P.J. SMITH**



**Defensive Back  
Blue Ridge, La.  
(John Curtis)  
6-2/205/4.65**



**BIO:** P.J. Smith is a talented defensive back prospect who joins the program from Louisiana prep powerhouse John Curtis High in River Ridge. Smith is one

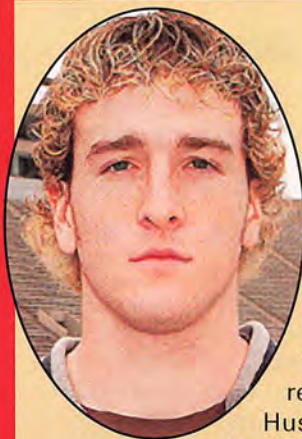
of two players in the class from Louisiana, both of whom committed to the Huskers in the final days before Signing Day. Smith was a four-year starter for Coach J.T. Curtis and helped the school to Class 2A state titles each of the past three seasons. Smith earned first-team all-state honors this season and was a member of the Baton Rouge Advocate's Louisiana "Super Dozen." He made 85 tackles, added four interceptions and forced a pair of fumbles for a 12-2 state championship team in 2007. Smith also saw action at receiver and caught a pair of touchdown passes. Smith was a two-way standout during his junior season. On the defensive side of the ball, Smith made 28 tackles, had three interceptions and broke up 14 passes. On offense, his 10 receptions covered 124 yards, including three touchdown catches. Smith is regarded as one of the top 15 players in Louisiana (three-stars) by Rivals.com. Smith chose Nebraska after also visiting Arkansas, Baylor and Southern Miss.

**WHY P.J. CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "Everybody was real enthused about Nebraska football . . . the fans, the players . . . everybody. I had a Nebraska jacket on that I borrowed, and people kept coming up and us telling they can't wait for the season. The facilities were great, too. A lot of people told me they'd be real nice, but they were outstanding."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Started as a freshman for his high school, which is somewhat usual. He's a physical athlete — a good basketball player. I had him at camp at LSU, and I know what he can do. He can do a lot of things to help you win. He has the ability to play both sides of the ball."

**JOHN CURTIS COACH J.T. CURTIS:** "P.J. is a tall, rangy guy who will strike you. He'll be a safety in college. Not only can P.J. run, but he'll hit people."

## **KODY SPANO**



**Quarterback  
Stephenville,  
Texas  
6-2/205/4.7**



**BIO:** Quarterback Kody Spano is one of two members of the 2008 Nebraska recruiting class to join the Huskers at mid-semester.

Spano completed his high school studies at Stephenville (Texas) High School in the first semester, and enrolled at Nebraska in January. Spano provided Stephenville High and Coach Chad Morris with a dual threat. During his senior season, Spano passed for 2,263 yards and 23 touchdowns, while completing better than 62 percent of his passes to lead Stephenville to a 10-2 record and a trip to the second round of the Class 4A state playoffs. He also rushed for 366 yards and 11 touchdowns. His performance as a senior earned him Offensive MVP honors in Class 4-A District 8, and second-team Class 4-A all-state honors. Spano also earned second-team all-state honors during his junior season. Spano is ranked as the nation's No. 9 dual-threat quarterback (three-stars) by Rivals.com and among the top 50 players in the Lone Star State. Spano also visited Oklahoma State and received scholarship offers from TCU and Tulsa.

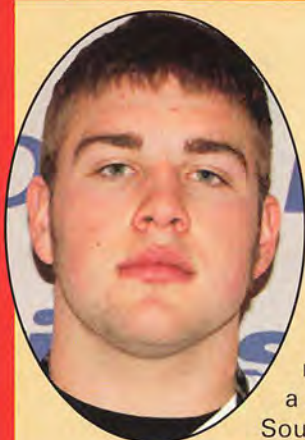
**WHY KODY CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I felt really comfortable there. Also, the facilities are top-notch and the stadium is like nothing I have ever seen before. The weight room is one of a kind. Everything is awesome."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Kody has the advantage of already being on campus. He enrolled in January. He came on our radar late, and we were able to get him away from some other top programs. He can make all of the throws and really has good arm talent. He can also run, which puts added pressure on the defense."

**STEPHENVILLE ASSISTANT KYLE SPANO:** "The thing that is funny about his stats this year is that a lot of all that stuff was done at halftime. There were a bunch of games where he only played until halftime. That was the time we'd put in our second team kid. Last year, Kody thought he had to make every play, but this year he learned that it was okay to throw the ball out of bounds and live for the next play."



## BAKER STEINKUHLER



**Offensive Line**  
**Lincoln, Neb.**  
**(Southwest)**  
**6-6/290/4.88**



**BIO:** Baker Steinkuhler is one of the most decorated members of the class, after a standout career at Lincoln Southwest High School. The son of 1983 Outland Trophy and Lombardi Award winner Dean Steinkuhler and the brother of current NU defensive lineman Ty Steinkuhler, Baker earned Lincoln Journal Star Super-State honors three straight years and Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska honors each of the past two seasons. Steinkuhler was recognized as the top lineman on the prestigious Parade All-America team, which consisted of the nation's top 58 players. Steinkuhler was a four-year starter and starred on both sides of the ball. He is expected to begin his NU career on the offensive line. As a junior, he anchored the lines for a 10-1 team that was ranked No. 1 for much of the season. Generally regarded as the top prospect in Nebraska, he was ranked as the No. 8 prospect in the country (five-stars) and the No. 2 offensive tackle by Rivals.com. Steinkuhler put his skills on display at the U.S. Army All-American Game in January, where he played defense. He committed to NU at the start of his junior season and did not take any additional visits.

**WHY BAKER CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "The facilities are real nice. and the weight room is real nice. Playing for NU is what I really wanted. I wanted to stay home. I didn't want to go anywhere else."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Baker is an extremely talented young man. He can really run. He's very physical already and is only going to get better. He has speed and can really move his feet. He can play either side of the football for us and is really going to be special either way."

**LINCOLN SOUTHWEST COACH MARK KING:** "I've coached two guys that have played in the NFL and several Division I scholarship athletes, but Baker is the best athlete I've ever coached. And that includes those guys that play on Sunday. His future is tremendous. You hate to jump ahead too far, but I think he can make a lot of money playing this game. He's just unbelievable."

## BRANDON THOMPSON



**Offensive Line**  
**The Woodlands,**  
**Texas**  
**6-6/295/5.08**



**BIO:** Brandon Thompson is one of four players in the Nebraska signing class who are expected to begin their Husker careers on the offensive line. The 6-6, 295-pound Thompson is also one of nine Texans in the signing group, the largest group of players from that state to sign with Nebraska in a single season. Thompson was the leader of the Highlanders' offense in 2007, providing protection for a quarterback who threw for nearly 1,600 yards and paving the way for three running backs to top 300 yards on the ground. Despite battling injuries that forced him to miss a good portion of his senior season, Thompson's play earned him first-team all-district honors in the 5A ranks. Thompson also earned all-district honors as a junior, when he helped Coach Mark Schmid's squad to a 6-5 record. Thompson is ranked as a three-star prospect and among the top 80 offensive tackle prospects in the nation by Rivals.com. In addition to his talents on the football field, Thompson also excels for the Highlander track team, throwing the shot put and discus. Thompson chose Nebraska over Purdue, Oklahoma State, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Colorado.

**WHY BRANDON CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I was pretty much blown away by everything. It was extremely nice. Everything went great. I'm just really excited because I know the tradition they have there and the football program. I mean, the program for offensive linemen there is one of the best."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Brandon is tall, long and athletic. He played in a good football program against good competition. Is going to do nothing but develop and get bigger and better."

**THE WOODLANDS COACH MARK SCHMID:** "Brandon didn't grade any lower than 80 percent all year long. He was generally in the 85 to 88 range. He is a dominant, dominant football player."



## QUENTIN TOAILOA



**Defensive Line**  
**Highland, Calif.**  
**(Redlands E. Valley)**  
**6-4/300/5.2**



**BIO:** Defensive line prospect Quentin Toailoa (pronounced toe-uh-loa) is one of three native Californians in Nebraska's 2008 signing class. The 6-4, 300-pounder has good speed for his size and is expected to line up on the interior defensive line for the Cornhuskers. The lone interior defensive line prospect in the Husker class, Toailoa will be asked to provide immediate depth to the Nebraska defensive ranks. Toailoa joined the Huskers after an outstanding prep career at Redlands East Valley High where he helped his team to a 12-1 record in 2007, before a loss in the semifinals of the playoffs. Toailoa racked up better than 90 tackles during his senior season, including three sacks. His performance netted him first-team all-league honors as a defensive tackle. Toailoa also earned all-league honors as a junior, when he compiled 70 tackles and three sacks. Toailoa is regarded as a three-star prospect and one of the nation's top 74 defensive tackles by Rivals.com. Toailoa chose Nebraska over offers from Oregon State, Utah, Arizona and Fresno State among others.

**WHY QUENTIN CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "It was a lot from when I was out there on my (official) visit. It was great, and I kept up on reading the Husker board with my parents, and we liked what the fans were saying about the program and all that stuff. And they were there for me from the beginning. Even though there's a new staff now, I like having Bo Pelini and his brother there and them being a defensive-oriented staff. It's a good fit for me."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Quentin is big and athletic for somebody that size. He can really run. He comes from a blue collar family. He's really strong at the point of attack and is going to be a big part of our future."

**EAST VALLEY COACH KURT BRUICH:** "Quentin has outstanding size and strength. He plays low to the ground and gets great push that helps him control offensive linemen with his hands. He is very quick for his size."

## MASON WALD



**Defensive Back**  
**Birmingham, Ala.**  
**(Vestavia Hills)**  
**5-11/205**



**BIO:** Mason Wald comes to Nebraska after starting at safety for three years for Birmingham Vestavia Hills, which had back-to-back appearances in the Alabama 6A state semifinals. The teammate of fellow 2008 prospect Justin Rogers, Wald became the 28th and final member of the recruiting class a day after signing day. Wald earned first-team all-state honors from the Alabama Sports Writers Association as a senior after accounting for over 100 tackles for the third consecutive year and adding seven interceptions. Wald also was named by the Birmingham (Ala.) News to its Super All-Metro team as a defensive back. Rivals.com ranks Wald with two stars. He chose Nebraska over late interest from South Florida, South Carolina, Memphis, Duke and Tennessee.

**WHY MASON CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "The coaches were awesome. I liked all of the coaches, especially Coach (Bo) Pelini. I liked all of them a lot. The facilities are incredible."

**HUSKERSILLUSTRATED.COM'S SEAN CALLAHAN:** "He's a hard-hitting safety out of Alabama, and it's good that they can get some more guys in that defensive backfield. He has a great attitude and that tough mindset. I think he's a nice pickup."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Mason is a physical, tough football player. He plays with a great attitude — I mean he blows people up. He came onto our radar late. This guy is fun to watch play. We looked at him as a staff, and we said this is the kind of guy we want to bring into our program. He's going to play somewhere and bring toughness and an attitude to our program that we want. This is how we want to play football around here."

**VESTAVIA HILLS COACH BUDDY ANDERSON:** "As a free safety, he was our leading tackler, which is unusual. He has a nose for the football. When people turn on the film, it doesn't take long to figure out that they've got to deal with him. He has a great instinct for the ball."



## LESTER WARD



**Running Back**  
**Brenham,**  
**Texas**  
**6-3/215/4.45**



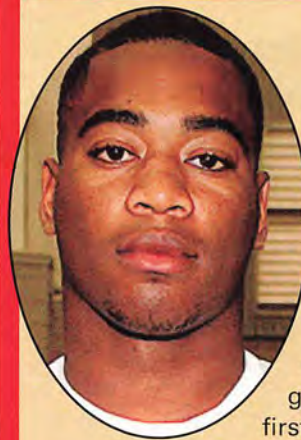
**BIO:** Lester Ward was one of the final commitments in the signing class. Ward is a talented all-around athlete, who has outstanding speed and versatility. Despite

being slowed by injury during his senior season, he managed to help his team to an 8-3 record and a district title by rushing for 1,200 yards. Ward played a key role for the Cubs in 2006, helping Brenham to a 12-2 record and a trip to the third round of the 4A state playoffs. He rushed for 972 yards and had about 200 receiving yards in 2006, despite missing four games. In addition to his football talents, Ward is a top-flight track athlete, competing in the hurdles and the triple jump. Ward is also strong in the classroom, as he has earned academic all-district honors in both 2006 and 2007. Ward also visited TCU, Baylor and Missouri before deciding on Nebraska.

**WHY LESTER CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I see a lot of opportunity there. Academically, they lead the Big 12 and in national areas as well. So there is opportunity academically, but not only that, I know coach (Ron) Brown is involved with the ministry and with me having a desire to one day pursue a career in the ministry field motivates me as well. Also, Nebraska obviously has great tradition, great fan support as well."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Lester has very good speed, athleticism, and really has the ability to play a number of different positions. He'll start at the running back position, but he can play H-back and do just so many things. He catches the ball really well and has good hands. He's going to be a hard guy to keep off the field because he has tremendous talent and great upside to what he can be in the future. We feel real good about he and Collins (Okafor) and think that they'll complement each other for years to come. Lester's dad played a number of years for the Dallas Cowboys on the defensive side of the ball, so it's in the genes there. I think when people see Lester they're going to say 'whoa.' He really looks the part, and he's had great success and put up good numbers in high school."

## ALONZO WHALEY



**Linebacker/Fullback**  
**Madisonville,**  
**Texas**  
**6-1/225/4.58**



**BIO:** Alonzo Whaley comes to Nebraska from a strong Texas Class 3A program where he was named a first-team all-state linebacker by the Associated Press as both a

junior and senior. Madisonville's all-time leading tackler recorded 162 tackles, forced eight fumbles, recovered five fumbles and returned an interception for a touchdown this season. Whaley was named District 19-3A defensive MVP as a senior, following his defensive co-MVP award in 2006. Whaley chose NU over Texas A&M, Oklahoma State, Arizona State, and Missouri. Rivals.com ranks Whaley with three stars and as the No. 61-ranked outside linebacker nationally and No. 88 overall player in Texas.

**WHY ALONZO CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I felt like I had a bond with the coaches before I even got on campus. I said that before I saw the facilities that it didn't really matter. I think Coach (Bo) Pelini and their staff are honorable, caring people. They're the type of people I want to be around for the next four or five years of my life."

**RIVALS.COM'S JEREMY CRABTREE:** "Everybody talks about his younger brother who's a top junior running back in the country, but I walked away more impressed with Alonzo. He has a great frame already."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "He's a very physical football player. He can run, and is a multi-sport athlete which is always a plus in my mind. He's a good basketball player and just an all-around good athlete. He comes from a great family. His mom is just a tremendous person and we're excited to have him. We expect a bright future for Alonzo around here."

**MADISONVILLE COACH GREG MORGAN:** "He put together another fantastic year. He shattered our tackling records, and all of our other defensive records. He was named the Defensive Player of the Year for our district. He also played fullback as well for us. He's a kid who got 150 reps a game for us. He played special teams and everything."



## DAVID WHITMORE



**Defensive Back**  
**Port Arthur, Texas**  
**(Memorial)**  
**6-2/185/4.5**



**BIO:** Defensive back David Whitmore was the first out-of-state player to commit to the class, announcing his intentions in April of 2007. He was the first of nine Texans to join NU's class.

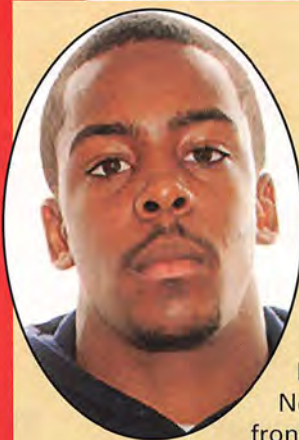
Whitmore starred as a cornerback for Coach Ronnie Thompson at Memorial High School in Port Arthur. As a senior, opposing teams often avoided Whitmore's side of the field, but he made enough plays in the secondary to earn honorable-mention all-district honors in the Class 5A ranks. Whitmore had a breakout season as a junior, making 90 tackles, intercepting two passes and breaking up 13 more, helping Memorial High to a 6-5 record and a tie for first place in the district. Whitmore was named to the Austin-American Statesman's Fabulous 55 in Texas and is ranked among the top 41 prospects overall in the state, according to Rivals.com. That same service rates Whitmore as the nation's No. 21 cornerback prospect (four stars). Whitmore also received offers from Kansas State, Oklahoma State and Missouri. His father, David Whitmore Sr., was a defensive back in the NFL for six seasons from 1990 to 1995, playing for the Giants, 49ers, Chiefs and Eagles.

**WHY DAVID CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I really like the coaches. I think we're in good together. I got to talk quite a bit with Coach Marvin (Sanders) when I was on my visit. It seems like we have a connection already. With coach (Bo) Pelini, it seems like he is real close with his players. That's a good thing."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "David was a pretty early commit for us. He comes from a great football background. His dad played on a Super Bowl team. David is an excellent football player. He has good speed and excellent ball skills and played against good competition."

**PORT ARTHUR MEMORIAL COACH RONNIE THOMPSON:** "He is a corner. This guy has good legwork, good footwork, good hips and he breaks on the ball and is very, very smart. He runs well (4.5-second 40) and trains well. He is just a good player. He is a good tackler and a good cover guy."

## JOSH WILLIAMS



**Defensive Line**  
**Denton, Texas**  
**(Ryan)**  
**6-4/225/4.8**



**BIO:** Josh Williams is one of three players in the 2008 class expected to begin their career at Nebraska on the defensive front. Williams is part of the Huskers' large recruiting harvest

from Texas, as nine players from the Lone Star State are included in the class. Williams has had standout seasons each of the past two years for coach Joey Florence at Denton's Ryan High School. During his senior season, Williams made 75 tackles, including 25 tackles for loss and 12 sacks, helping Ryan to a 6-5 record. His play earned him first-team all-district honors in the Class 4A ranks. Williams also earned first-team all-district honors as a junior in 2006. He made 68 tackles, including 22 tackles for loss, and logged six sacks and six pass breakups during his junior campaign. Williams is ranked as the nation's No. 12 weakside defensive end prospect (three stars) and the No. 48 overall prospect in the Lone Star state by Rivals.com. He is also listed as the No. 19 prospect by the Dallas Morning News on its Area 100. Williams also visited Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky and Missouri, and received offers from Texas and Texas A&M, among others, before choosing Nebraska.

**WHY JOSH CHOSE NEBRASKA:** "I really got a really good feeling for all of the coaches. They all seemed like straightforward guys. They said they could use me at Nebraska and want me really, really bad. They told me that there is an open opportunity at my position. Bo Pelini seemed pretty intense and fired up. It seemed like he has some fire in him. I was real excited about that."

**NEBRASKA COACH BO PELINI:** "Josh is very tall and can really run. He's extremely athletic. You talk to all the coaches in the Dallas area, and they rave about the guy. They say that they didn't have an answer for him. He has a chance to be a really special player down the line."

**RYAN COACH JOEY FLORENCE:** "From January to June last year, he got in the weight room and put on about 20 pounds of muscle, and went from a Division I player to a top-tier Division I player."



# Tapping Texas

## Lone Star State productive for new Husker coaching staff

By Rick Shaw

**E**very year, the state of Texas produces hundreds of Division I college football prospects. The Nebraska coaching staff tapped into that talent hotbed to finish off its recruiting class of 2008 and appears poised to make the Lone Star State a principle area of focus for the future.

When all of the ink was dry on letters of intent, nine of 28 recruits on Nebraska's list hailed from Texas. Six of those committed to Nebraska after Bo Pelini was named head coach on Dec. 2, and another Texan came back to the Huskers after de-committing.

David Whitmore, the highest-rated Texas prospect signed by Nebraska, delivered his pledge to the Huskers' former coaching regime back in April. The 6-foot-2, 185-pound cornerback out of Port Arthur never wavered on his commitment, despite a season-ending change to the Nebraska coaching staff and heavy pressure from Oklahoma State, Missouri, Kansas State and others.

"The coaches tell me that they need cornerbacks," Whitmore said. "They said they don't have much depth at that spot. Depending on what I do, I could maybe even earn a starting spot. We'll see what happens."

Rivals.com rates Whitmore as a four-star prospect and the nation's No. 21 cornerback.

Offensive lineman Brandon Thompson (6-6, 295) out of The Woodlands and defensive end Josh Williams (6-4, 225) out of Ryan High in Denton were the only other Texas recruits listed on Nebraska's commitment list when Pelini was named head coach in Lincoln. Williams, however, changed his commitment to Colorado for a brief period before coming back into the Husker fold in early January.

"I was committed in the beginning, and that's where I wanted to be," Williams said. "I was just unsure about the new coaches. My visit to Nebraska in January was a good chance to get to know those guys. I really feel good about the coaches and the opportunity I have. I feel it's the best

## RIVALS.COM 2008 TEAM RANKINGS

### Top 25

School	Points
1. Alabama	2,836
2. Notre Dame	2,744
3. Florida	2,600
4. Miami	2,467
5. Oklahoma	2,422
6. Georgia	2,321
7. USC	2,312
8. Florida State	2,251
9. Ohio State	2,229
10. Michigan	2,215
11. LSU	2,134
12. Clemson	2,113
13. UCLA	1,924
14. Texas	1,919
15. Colorado	1,510
16. Texas A&M	1,482
17. Minnesota	1,395
18. Virginia Tech	1,375
19. Oregon	1,359
20. Auburn	1,357
21. Clemson	1,436
22. South Carolina	1,322
23. Illinois	1,293
24. Mississippi	1,276
25. Washington	1,255

### Other Big 12

26. Missouri	1,214
27. Oklahoma St.	1,211
28. Kansas State	1,194
<b>30. Nebraska</b>	<b>1,159</b>
40. Kansas	899
42. (tie) Texas Tech	700
51. Baylor	453
62. Iowa State	281

place for me."

Rated a three-star prospect by Rivals, Williams turned down offers from Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Missouri, Colorado and others to rejoin the Huskers.

Nebraska may have signed its quarterback of the future in Stephenville standout Kody Spano. The 6-2, 205-pound signal caller turned down overtures from Oklahoma State, TCU and Tulsa in picking the Huskers.

Spano, who graduated high school in December and enrolled at Nebraska for the spring semester, threw for 2,190 yards and 23 touchdowns as a senior, completing 62 percent of his passes. He's rated a three-star prospect and the nation's No. 9 dual-threat quarterback by Rivals.

Twin brothers Steven and Courtney Osborne, of South Garland High in Garland, joined the Husker class in late January. Stephen, a 6-4, 185-pound receiver said the football environment in Lincoln was just too good to pass up.

"It's the people, the program, Coach Pelini," Osborne said. "They all live for football."

Steven tallied 38 receptions for 601 yards and 10 touchdowns as a senior. Courtney, a 6-3, 175-pound safety prospect, was one of South Garland's leading tacklers in 2007. According to South Garland coach Micky Moss, Courtney is "wired" to play defense at the college level.

"Courtney, he's a hitter, a striker, he's a sure-tackler, and he may be the fastest kid we had on defense," Moss said. "When it came to field speed, he blew everybody away. I think he could play multiple positions, but I think his strengths are defense."

Both Osbornes are rated three-star prospects by Rivals and passed up scholarship offers from Kansas, SMU, Utah and others to join the Huskers.

The de-commitments of offensive line prospects Trevor Robinson (to Notre Dame), Dan Hoch (to Missouri) and Bryce Givens (to Colorado) opened the door for David Grant of Killeen to jump

on board. The 6-6, 295-pound offensive tackle turned down offers from Texas Tech, Baylor, Houston, Iowa State and others after visiting Nebraska in early January.

"Nebraska is the best place for me, and my family thinks Nebraska is the best place for me as well," Grant said. "What can I say; it's great to be a Husker. I can't wait to say that to everybody."

Grant, who possesses good speed (5.0-second 40-yard dash) and strength (335-pound bench press) for a lineman,



is rated a three-star prospect and the No. 90 prospect in Texas by Rivals.

Alonzo Whaley, a speedy outside linebacker from Madisonville, turned down offers from Oklahoma State, Texas A&M, Arizona State and Missouri and opted, instead, to become a part of Pelini's defense in Lincoln. The 6-1, 225-pounder said his relationship with the Husker coaching staff made his decision relatively easy.

"I felt like I had a bond with the coaches before I even got on campus," Whaley said. "I said that before I saw the facilities that it didn't really matter. I think (visiting) made it even better, made me want to come here even more because the facilities are great, but the coaches are even better.

"I think coach Bo Pelini and their staff are honorable, caring people. They're the type of people I want to be around for the next four or five years of my life."

Rated a three-star prospect and the No. 88 prospect in the state by Rivals, Whaley earned first-team all-state honors and was named his district's Defensive MVP in 2007 after racking up more than 150 tackles as a senior.

Alonzo Whaley's younger brother, Chris Whaley, holds a Nebraska offer. The younger Whaley was the overall district player of the year as a running back and has been named to the pre-season 2009 Rivals 100 list.

Lester Ward, a running back from Brenham, changed his commitment from Baylor to Nebraska in early February. The 6-3, 215-pounder missed six games because of injury in 2007, but, when he came back, he averaged more than 100 yards per contest and seven yards per carry. One of the fastest members of the Husker class, Ward has been clocked at 4.45-seconds over 40-yards.

"I see a lot of opportunity there," Ward said. "Academically, they lead the Big 12 and in national areas as well. So there is opportunity academically, but not only that, I know coach (Ron) Brown is involved with the ministry, and me having a desire to one day pursue a career in the ministry field motivates me as well. Also, Nebraska obviously has great tradition and great fan support as well."

Nebraska made Texas a primary area of focus in this recruiting cycle, filling almost a third of its class with Lone Star standouts. It's a philosophy and focus that the Husker coaching staff is likely to maintain in building the recruiting class for 2009. ■

For more daily recruiting information, visit [huskersillustrated.com](http://huskersillustrated.com), a member of the Rivals.com network.

## RECRUITING NOTES

# Southern Success

By Sean Stevens

In recent seasons, Nebraska has had difficulty recruiting in the Deep South, however, with new head coach Bo Pelini, linebackers coach Mike Ekeler and defensive ends coach John Papuchis all coming to Lincoln from LSU, the Huskers were able to make some inroads in the 2008 class.

Nebraska signed two prospects from Louisiana and Alabama and one each from Georgia and Florida.

P.J. Smith is a 6-foot-2, 205-pound safety from River Ridge, La. Smith chose the Huskers after taking official visits to Baylor, Arkansas, and Southern Mississippi. Shortly after his Jan. 18 official visit to Lincoln, it was clear that the Huskers would be tough to beat for Smith's signature.

"It was a 10," Smith said. "Nebraska is my leader by a good bit. It was pretty cold, but that wasn't a problem for me. It's going to take a lot to beat them."

The second prospect from the Pelican State to choose NU was Khiry Cooper, a 6-2, 180-pound speedy receiver from Shreveport. Cooper also had scholarship offers from Michigan and Arkansas, but NU tight ends coach Ron Brown made a strong impression on him.

"I got to spend some time with him (at school), and he went to church with me," Cooper said. "I just like how he is so outspoken about his faith. He really opens up. He's one of the best guys I've ever been around."

Birmingham, Ala., teammates Justin Rogers (5-11, 180) and Mason Wald (5-11, 195) gave Nebraska its first signees from the state since Brett Byford in 2003.

Rogers is a running back who rushed for more than 4,200 yards and 59 touchdowns in his last two seasons. He spurned schools such as UCLA, Clemson, and Auburn for the Huskers.

"I enjoyed talking to Coach (Bo) Pelini," said Rogers. "He told me some stuff that was good to hear, but I felt he was telling me the truth. All coaches will tell you things to try and get you to come to their schools, but with him, I really believed what he was saying."

Wald, who had interest from South Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee among others, will likely play safety at NU but could fit into many slots.

"They are talking about me for safety and a little bit for linebacker and playing in the nickel or dime," said Wald. "My main position is at safety."

Antonio Bell, a 6-2, 180-pound wide receiver from Daytona Beach, Fla., will come to NU from the same school that produced sophomore offensive lineman Cruz Barrett. Bell initially committed to Tennessee, but things changed, and he ended up choosing the Huskers over West Virginia. He totaled 45 catches for 776 yards and nine touchdowns to garner second-team all-state in Florida's largest classification.

Rochelle, Ga., cornerback Alfonzo Dennard (5-10, 190), who is rated by Rivals.com as the No. 25 cornerback in the country, helped lead his team to the state championship game. He de-committed from North Carolina to sign with Nebraska, also turning down Clemson and Purdue offers. ■



# 'Something

***Nebraska junior guard Harley took mom's advice to 'stick it out'***

**Stories by Mike Babcock**

**A**djusting was difficult. No question about that. In fact, "I don't think I adjusted," Steve Harley said.

OK, so maybe he did, but only after "a couple of months."

What did he mean by a couple of months?

"Three or four," he said with a smile.

Oh yes, and don't think by adjusting he quit thinking about packing up and going home. He was ready to do that "about every other week," he said. "But I knew it was something I had to do to try to get ahead in life."

Besides, his mom wouldn't let him come home.

"She always tells me, 'Stick it out,' " he said.

Harley stuck it out for two years at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, a community of about 12,000, located 25 miles west of Lubbock. The area's economy is based on oil and agriculture. The atmosphere is definitely country.

"I'm used to the city," said Harley. "It was a change."

By comparison, Lincoln, Neb., offered a "city environment," he said. "This seems a lot better than that. When I visited, it was cool. It looked like home to me."

Harley is from suburban Washington, D.C., Temple Hills, Md., which he left to further his education and play major college basketball.

Before he could do the latter, however, he had to meet NCAA entrance requirements. And that meant junior college.

He sat out a year after high school but attracted the attention of South Plains coach Steve Green while playing in what he described as a "rec center" tournament.

On his recruiting trip to South Plains, "they took me to the biggest town that was close," said Harley. He hung out in Lubbock, home to Texas Tech.

"I guess they tricked me," he said.

Harley's subsequent adjustment problems didn't carry over to the basketball court. He averaged 20.7 points for a 24-8 team as a freshman and 19.2 points for a 26-7 team as a sophomore, earning first-team NJCAA All-America recognition. He was ranked as the nation's No. 3 junior college point guard by nbadraft.net.

What Harley knew about Nebraska before he visited campus was its football tradition. "I couldn't stand their football team," he said. "I was a Florida State fan."

That was then. He's a Cornhusker fan now. And he enjoys going to games at Memorial Stadium. In fact, "I'd rather watch football than basketball," he said.

He'd rather play basketball than either, of course.

Assistant coach David Anwar was instrumental in recruiting him. Anwar, who showed him around during his recruiting visit, knew one of



his "mentors" back home.

Harley also connected with coach Doc Sadler, whose approach is similar to Green's. Sadler is "about business. Between the lines, he's about business," Harley said. "Off the court, he's one of the coolest coaches. But once you get inside the gym . . ."



# I Had To Do'



After a slow start in Big 12 Conference play, Steve Harley moved into the starting lineup during a stretch when he scored 46 points in three games.

Sadler's on-court intensity is well-documented.

Harley arrived at Nebraska a week before the start of fall-semester classes, after finishing an associate's degree. As a result, he didn't have the summer to adjust to his new team-

mates. He was immediately comfortable with them off the court, but becoming comfortable with them on the court took a little longer.

Even though he scored 14 points in the fourth game against Creighton, after scoring 11 in the previous game

against Norfolk State, he didn't show the offense expected of him until three games into the conference season. He scored five points in the Big 12 opener against Kansas and then went scoreless in a loss at Colorado.

After playing a combined 37 minutes in those two games, he played 32 minutes off the bench against Baylor, and scored 15 points, hitting 6-of-11 shots. That effort earned him a start, his fourth of the season, and he responded with 16 points at Kansas.

He also started the next game at Missouri and scored 15 points. During the three-game stretch, he hit 17-of-36 shots from the field, including 2-of-3 from 3-point range.

The offensive surge was a result of "just being more aggressive, coming off ball screens, looking for my shot more," he said. Sadler "told all our guards, me, Ade (Dagunduro), Sek (Henry), we need to be more aggressive; we've got to score the ball more."

"At the beginning of the season, I wasn't playing well. I wasn't getting the shots or anything. But as I started getting more confidence . . . that's exactly what it was. Now I'm starting to get more comfortable around them (teammates) on the floor."

His scoring was a result of more than confidence and being aggressive. "We tried to move him around a little bit, tried to get him moving off the baseline screens, something we haven't done, Sadler said after the Baylor game. "That's something I had talked with his junior college coach (Green). That's something they did for him."

"Steve's got to score for us. He got in a little rhythm."

The soft-spoken Harley lives by himself. When he's not playing basketball or studying, he's probably watching television. He prefers sitcoms to basketball on television — "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" and "Roseanne" are among his favorites.



He also prefers rap music, Lil Wayne and Jay-Z, which helps him get in the right mindset for games, "most of the time," he said. He doesn't have a fixed pregame routine, and he's not superstitious, though if he plays well, he'll wear the same sneakers.

"I try to wear them until I have a bad game," he said.

He phones home regularly, of course, and gets basketball advice from his parents. His mom "thinks she's a coach," he said. "She calls me with her input, what she thinks I should be doing. She doesn't know what she's talking about half the time."

She knew what she was talking about when she told him to stick it out at South Plains College, however. That's why he hasn't thought about leaving Nebraska.

"I've been on my own for two years, so coming here was no different," he said.

#### A BEAST

Harley is a Washington Wizards fan, and his favorite Wizard is Gilbert Arenas, although after Arenas was sidelined following knee surgery early in the season so "now I've got to go with Caron Butler," Harley said.

Arenas is "just a beast," said Harley. "He goes out there and scores. Plus, he's a good guy." Arenas has given back to the community, among other things providing financial support for outdoor basketball tournaments in the Washington, D.C., area.

#### BIG AL

Senior center Aleks Maric has been a beast for the Cornhuskers. No surprise there. Maric earned his second Big 12 Player of the Week honor (sharing it with Missouri sophomore J.T. Tiller) in early February, after scoring 27 points and pulling down 26 rebounds in victories at Missouri and against Iowa State.

The award was the second of the season and third of his career.

#### SECOND TO MARIC

Who's Nebraska's second scoring option? Sek Henry, probably, according to Sadler. "Aleks is the guy we've got to go to. But after Aleks, I think Sek may be our second-best offensive player," he said following the Iowa State game in Lincoln.

Though Henry has started about half the games this season, "you want somebody you can bring off the bench that can score points," said Sadler.

"Everybody wants to start. I understand that. But when you're struggling to score points, you've maybe got to take that guy you think is your best offensive player that can give you that punch . . . you know, at the 4-minute mark or whatever." ■

## RESULTS, SCHEDULE

#### (HOME GAMES AT DEVANEY CENTER, UNLESS NOTED)

Nov. 2	*Nebraska Wesleyan	W 70-50
Nov. 6	*Wayne State	W 74-51
Nov. 10	Presbyterian College	W 67-52
Nov. 17	Alabama A&M	W 59-42
Nov. 20	Norfolk State	W 83-48
Nov. 24	@Creighton	L 74-62
Nov. 26	IPFW	W 79-62
Dec. 2	Arizona State	W 62-47
Dec. 5	@Western Kentucky	L 69-62 (ot)
Dec. 9	Rutgers	W 63-51
Dec. 11	Savannah State	W 82-37
Dec. 15	Oregon (Qwest Center, Omaha)	W 88-79 (ot)
Dec. 22	North Carolina Central	W 71-28
Dec. 29	Alcorn State	W 77-53
Jan. 4	Maryland-East. Shore	W 86-50
Jan. 12	Kansas	L 79-58
Jan. 15	@Colorado	L 55-51
Jan. 19	Baylor	L 72-70
Jan. 26	@Kansas	L 84-49
Jan. 30	@Missouri	W 66-62
Feb. 2	Iowa State	W 64-56
Feb. 6	@Kansas State	L 74-59
Feb. 9	Texas Tech	W 73-62
Feb. 13	Missouri	L 86-78 (ot)
Feb. 16	@Iowa State (ESPN+)	
Feb. 20	Kansas State (ESPN2)	
Feb. 23	@Texas A&M (ESPN+)	
Feb. 27	Oklahoma	
Mar. 1	@Oklahoma State (ESPN+)	
Mar. 4	@Texas (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 9	Colorado (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 13-16	Big 12 Championship, Kansas City (ESPN+)	

\*Exhibition



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Nebraska sophomore Yvonne Turner leads the Big 12 Conference with 3.0 steals per game in league action.

# What She Enjoys

***'Stopper' Turner understands that defense can create offense***

**Y**vonne Turner told her older brothers she was going to dunk a basketball before she finished high school. And she did during her senior season, sort of.

On a breakaway following a steal — something she has turned into an art — she got the ball above the rim. It just didn't go in. Even so, "people were excited," Turner said.

At school the next day, classmates "made fun of me for (missing) it. But

they still thought it was cool because they'd never seen anything like that."

Turner stands only 5-foot-8. But if you doubt she could have dunked, consider that she can really jump. Plus, she has long arms, and she can palm a basketball, even a larger boys' basketball, grip it with one hand. She's been able to, she figures, since she was in the sixth grade. Just look at her long fingers and you won't question that.



As for her jumping ability, "I don't have that much 'hops' to (dunk) with two hands, but I can get it up there with one," Nebraska's sophomore guard said.

Not that Turner is obsessed with dunking, or scoring for that matter. Her basketball identity isn't defined by the number of points she puts up, though she put up plenty during her high school career, averaging double figures in four varsity seasons.

As a senior at Bellevue (Neb.) East High, she earned WBCA All-America recognition, averaging 15.4 points to lead the Chieftains to the Class A state championship.

She also averaged 4.4 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 3.7 steals.

"I never was a ball hog growing up, never was and never will be," she said. "My dad always told me defense wins games, and that's what I think the key is. If a coach wants a defensive stop, I'll be that person or I'll help my teammates make the stop."

Turner began her high school career at Omaha Millard South, starting as a freshman. She played her final three seasons at Bellevue East, which reached the Class A championship game when she was a sophomore and junior before finally winning a title.

Despite an impressive high school resume, she had to wait her turn as a Nebraska freshman. She also had to catch up after missing preseason conditioning because of a stress fracture in her left foot. The injury required a walking boot for eight weeks.

She played in 28 games last season, coming off the bench, averaging 12 minutes and 2.3 points. But that was OK. "I didn't care whether I started or not," said Turner. "That was my mindset. I had no problem coming off the bench."

"I still don't care if I start or I don't start. I know when I'm in the game however many minutes I average, I'm going to play my heart out until the end of the game. So it really doesn't matter to me if I'm the sixth man or eighth man. I just want to play."

She has played this season about as much as anyone, starting every game. Her scoring has increased, in part because her 3-point shooting has improved dramatically. After making seven of her first 38 3-pointers, she hit



Yvonne Turner is NU's fourth-leading scorer at 8.0 points per game.

16 of the next 35.

In the first 10 conference games, she was 17-of-38 (44.7 percent).

"My dad, my coaches, everybody said I just need to have confidence and I'll knock that 3-point shot down," said Turner. "That's what I continue to do. I'm going to keep shooting until Coach tells me to stop shooting. If you have confidence in your shot, then you know it's going to go in. So I've got to have confidence."

She hit only 7-of-27 from 3-point range last season. But then, scoring wasn't her focus. "I wasn't so much aggressive on offense as I should have been," she said.

"We had other people who stepped up to the plate."

Defense can create offense, as her dad constantly reminds her, and defense is what she enjoys most, playing from one end of the court to the other, 94 feet, "helping my teammates out," Turner said. "I love to see my teammates smile."

And they smile when she or someone else makes a defensive stop.

They also smile when she gets a steal, and she has gotten plenty of those. Through 24 games, she had 69 — 33 more than Kelsey Griffin had last season to lead the team.

Twice this season she's made eight steals in a game.

The key is studying opponents, learning their tendencies. Can they go to their left, and if the can, what do they do? She learned in high school to watch a ball-handler's hips and anticipate what the ball-handler would do, try to be a step ahead.

She can make an opponent uncomfortable with her quickness and those long arms, no doubt about that. And steals, "they're all great," said Turner. "But that's not what my intentions are going into the game."

Her intentions are to be defensive, whatever form that might take. However, if she has an opportunity to dunk off a steal, she's going to take it.

After all, she can palm a ball. And she has the hops to get to the rim.

During the Denver game at the Devaney Sports Center in late December, the ball was wedged between the rim and the backboard. Turner jumped and tried to dislodge the ball. She was unsuccessful, however, so another ball was used to knock it free.

Turner jumped high enough. The ball was just stuck.

"If it hadn't been so stuck, I would have gotten it," she said.

You can believe that. ■

## RESULTS, SCHEDULE

### (HOME GAMES AT DEVANEY CENTER)

Nov. 1	*Nebraska-Kearney	W 62-48
Nov. 5	*Nebraska-Omaha	W 78-50
Nov. 9	UTEP	W 81-74
Nov. 11	Mississippi	W 80-59
Nov. 17	Florida	W 90-63
Nov. 23	**Marist	L 66-59
Nov. 24	**Utah	L 56-44
Nov. 25	**Akron	W 75-47
Nov. 30	Creighton	W 79-65
Dec. 2	Robert Morris	W 73-58
Dec. 8	USC	W 87-69
Dec. 13	@Cal State Bakersfield	W 66-62
Dec. 15	@Long Beach State	W 75-52
Dec. 22	@Ohio State	L 86-74
Dec. 30	Denver	W 73-38
Jan. 2	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	W 67-39
Jan. 9	Texas	W 56-45
Jan. 12	Kansas	W 71-51
Jan. 16	@Oklahoma	L 80-72
Jan. 19	@Iowa State	W 82-72
Jan. 23	Texas A&M	W 73-60
Jan. 26	@Baylor	L 76-56
Jan. 30	Kansas State	L 77-75
Feb. 3	@Missouri	W 73-67
Feb. 6	@Colorado	W 80-71
Feb. 10	Oklahoma State	L 92-81
Feb. 17	@Kansas (ESPN360/Sunflower)	
Feb. 21	Missouri (FSN Midwest)	
Feb. 24	@Texas Tech	
Feb. 27	@Kansas State (FSN Midwest)	
Mar. 2	Colorado	
Mar. 5	Iowa State	
Mar. 11-15	Big 12 Championship, Kansas City	
*Exhibition		**Oahu Classic



# CHAIRMEN OF THE BOARDS



Dave Hoppen

(Venson Hamilton's school-career record for rebounds would appear to be safe in the immediate future. But, barring the unforeseen, Cornhusker senior Aleks Maric will have moved up to second on the all-time list by season's end, well ahead of the closest competitors. Huskers Illustrated takes a quick look at some of the best rebounders in Nebraska history.)

## DAVE HOPPEN (1982-86) NO. 42 6-11, 235 Omaha, Neb.

The Cornhuskers have never won an NCAA Tournament game. But they might have if Hoppen hadn't suffered a season-ending knee injury in a game at Colorado on Feb. 1, 1986. They won the game, as well as five of the remaining eight in the regular season to finish 8-6 and third in the Big Eight Conference. They won a first-round game in the conference tournament in Kansas City to give them 19 victories, enough to earn the first NCAA bid in school history. They were sent to Charlotte, N.C., where they lost to Western Kentucky, 67-59. Undoubtedly, they would have benefitted from Hoppen's scoring and rebounding. He averaged 22.1 points and 7.7 rebounds as a senior. Despite missing the final 11 games that season, he finished atop the school career-scoring list and second on the school career-rebounding list, just nine behind Leroy Chalk. Hoppen broke or tied 19 school records and five Big Eight records during a four-year career in which he started 111 consecutive games, every one from the opener against Denver in 1982-83 on. Venson Hamilton subsequently passed him and Chalk on the rebounding list, and Aleks Maric has passed them both this season. But he remains No. 1 in career scoring, with 2,167 points. He was a three-time first-team all-conference selection. And his jersey was the first in Cornhusker history to be retired. ■

# LISTS

## ALL-CONFERENCE WALK-ONS, TOM OSBORNE ERA

(Football players who paid their own way to Nebraska and earned first-team all-conference recognition, from in state unless indicated, boldface indicates All-America recognition as well)

Steve Manstedt, DE, 1973, Wahoo  
Clete Pillen, LB, 1976, Monroe  
I.M. Hipp, IB, 1977, Chapin, S.C.  
Dean Sukup, PK, 1979, Cozad  
Kelly Saalfeld, C, 1979, Columbus  
**Derrie Nelson, DE, 1979-80, Fairmont**  
**\*Jarvis Redwine, IB, 1979-80, Inglewood, Calif.**  
\*David Clark, DT, 1980, Odessa, Texas  
Jeff Krejci, S, 1981, Schuyler  
Ric Lindquist, CB, 1981, Plattsmouth  
**Jimmy Williams, DE, 1981, Washington, D.C.**

Tony Felici, DE, 1981-82, Omaha  
Greg Orton, OG, 1984, Nebraska City  
Scott Strasburger, DE, 1984, Holdrege  
Dale Klein, PK, 1985, Seward  
\*Brian Blankenship, OG, 1985, Omaha  
Keven Lightner, OT, 1987, Hastings  
Tim Rother, DT, 1987, Bellevue  
\*Bob Sledge, OT, 1988, Omaha  
Charles Fryar, CB, 1988, Burlington, N.J.

Mike Stigge, P, 1991, Washington, Kan.  
\*Jim Scott, C, 1991, Ansley  
^John Parrella, DT, 1991-92, Grand Island  
Ken Mehlin, C/OG, 1993, Humboldt  
**Jared Tomich, RE, 1995-96, St. John, Ind.**

&Dan Hadenfeldt, P, 2000, Des Moines, Iowa  
\*Transfers: Redwine, Oregon State; Clark, Texas-El Paso; Blankenship, Nebraska-Omaha; Sledge, South Dakota; Scott, Kearney State  
^Signed letter of intent with Colorado but didn't enroll after scholarship offer was pulled  
&Walked on when Osborne was coach

## ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICA WALK-ONS

(Cornhusker football players who paid their own way to Nebraska and earned Academic All-America honors)

Kelly Saalfeld, C, 1979, Columbus  
Ric Lindquist, CB, 1981, Plattsmouth  
Scott Strasburger, DE, 1984, Holdrege  
Dale Klein, PK, 1986, Seward  
Jeff Jamrog, DE, 1987, Omaha  
Mark Blazek, S, 1987-88, Valparaiso  
David Edeal, C, 1990, Loomis  
Mike Stigge, P, 1991-92, Washington, Kan.  
Matt Shaw, TE, 1994, Lincoln  
Joel Makovicka, FB, 1997-98, Brainard  
Bill Lafleur, P, 1998, Norfolk  
\*Chad Sievers, LB, 2004, Elkhorn  
\*Transfer: New Mexico State



# 'Just Part o

## *Anderson, Huskers understand that weather is part of the package*

**By Mike Babcock**

**C**ertainly, global warming is a concern. But Nebraska weather in February and March is no less predictable now than it was a year ago, or 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, or 30 years ago. Those months can be unseasonably warm. More likely, however, they're characterized by cold temperatures and snow. That hasn't changed.

Nevertheless, the weather issue, and not being able to practice outdoors, is always raised during the Nebraska baseball team's preseason news conference.

Coach Mike Anderson can count on it.

"My biggest fear . . . I'm not kidding you, I've got five guys sitting back there . . . is me saying something in front of them that would give them any thought or doubt as to an excuse," Anderson said in response to a weather-related question this year.

A handful of players were sitting in the back of the room.

"We chose Nebraska. We wanted to be at Nebraska, as a head coach, as assistant coaches, as players. It was our decision to be here, and this is part of the package. Absolutely no complaints. So let's make it work," said Anderson.

"If we can't get outside, we can't. It's just part of what it is."

In addition to answering the obligatory weather questions, Anderson talked about a team that has made it

"extremely fun to come to the office every day and know that I'm going to coach these kids. And I mean that," he said. "It's a good vibe."

The word "kids" is appropriate here.

"It wasn't me who said this line," said Anderson. "But I heard it: 'We have enough young guys on our team that we need to understand, we get about halfway through practice, and a few of them are coming up to me and asking what time recess is.'"

The roster includes 20 players who have yet to see action at Nebraska, 15 newcomers and five who redshirted last season. Six of the newcomers are transfers, four at mid-year: pitchers Joe Hatasaki and Erik Anderson, catcher-first baseman Cody Neer and first baseman-outfielder Tyler Farst. Hatasaki and Neer came from Division I schools.

Pitcher Johnny Dorn, second baseman Jake Opitz and outfielder Bryce Nimmo are the team's most experienced players, while Jeff Tezak, Craig Corrington, Mitch Abeita, DJ Belfonte and Jake Mort also have starting experience.

"We've got some guys that are proven, some guys that have some promise and some guys that have potential," Anderson said. "If we can mix and mold and put those pieces of the puzzle together, we're going to be in good shape."

"These kids, I think, are prepared for the challenge."

As for the weather, "this is what we chose," said Anderson.



### **HERE'S JOHNNY**

Dorn has been in the Cornhuskers' weekend rotation the past three seasons and has a 31-9 career record. He needs 10 wins to tie Shane Komine's school record. He also ranks among Nebraska's career leaders in innings pitched, starts and strikeouts.

"We've got to lean on him. We won't lean on him to the point of misusing his arm, but in terms of leadership, discipline, all those type of things," Anderson said.

### **POP IN THE LINEUP**

The Cornhusker lineup isn't power-laden, but "I'd like to think we'll be able to score some runs without home runs," said Anderson.



# f What It Is'



Senior right-hander Johnny Dorn, 31-9 in his three seasons at Nebraska, needs 10 wins to tie Shane Komine's school record.



Mike Anderson



DJ Belfonte

"I'm not sure the Buck Beltzer days are here in terms of home runs. But I do think we can score runs.

"Home runs would be nice. And I

think we're on the right recruiting trail, (with) the kids we've signed, some of the bigger kids we have."

Belfonte isn't one of the bigger kids, at 5-foot-10 and 175 pounds. And he didn't hit a home run last season as a freshman. But "you just play the game the way you've always played," said Belfonte. "Coach 'A' (Anderson) always talks about roles. He constantly tells me what my role is, but in my head, I still want to hit home runs.

"You don't come to the ballpark and say, 'My role's not to hit a lot of home runs, so I'm going to swing slower.' "

## ROSTER

**Freshmen:** David Stewart, OF, L/R; Tyler Rank, RHP-C, L/R; Sean Yost, RHP, R/R; Matt Freeman, RHP, R/R; Casey Hauptman, RHP, R/R; Ben Kline, INF, R/R; Ryan Christensen, LHP, L/L; Mike Mariot, RHP, R/R.

**Redshirted Freshmen:** Brett Sowers, INF, R/R; Andy Cotton, INF, R/R; Joe Broekemeier, RHP, R/R; Mike Nesseth, RHP, R/R; Eric Rose, LHP, L/L.

**Sophomores:** DJ Belfonte, OF, L/L; Erik Anderson, RHP, R/R; Joe Hatasaki, LHP, L/L; Tyler Farst, OF, R/R.

**Juniors:** Jake Mort, INF, R/R; Drew Gray, C, R/R; Nick Sullivan, OF, L/R; Clay Cuno, OF, R/R; Dan Jennings, LHP, L/L; Erik Bird, RHP, R/R; Cody Neer, C-INF, S/R; Zach Herr, LHP, L/L; Aaron Pribanic, RHP, R/R.

**Seniors:** Jake Opitz, INF, L/R; Mitch Abeita, C, R/R; Thad Weber, RHP, R/R; Craig Corriston, INF, R/R; Jeff Tezak, INF, S/R; Johnny Dorn, RHP, R/R; Bryce Nimmo, OF, L/L.

## SCHEDULE

**Feb. 22** — at Stanford (DH), **23** — at Stanford, **24** — at Stanford, **29** — UC Riverside.

**March 1** — UC Riverside (DH), **2** — UC Riverside, **4** — Nebraska-Kearney, **7** — Northern Colorado, **8** — Northern Colorado (DH), **9** — Northern Colorado, **11** — South Dakota State, **14** — at Kansas State, **15** — at Kansas State, **16** — at Kansas State, **18** — Arkansas, **19** — Arkansas, **21** — Oklahoma, **22** — Oklahoma, **23** — Oklahoma, **25** — Northern Colorado, **26** — Northern Colorado, **28** — at Texas, **29** — at Texas, **30** — at Texas.

**April 1** — Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium, Omaha, **4** — Texas Tech, **5** — Texas Tech, **6** — Texas Tech, **8** — at Iowa, **11** — at Oklahoma State, **12** — at Oklahoma State, **13** — at Oklahoma State, **15** — Wichita State, **18** — Kansas, **19** — Kansas, **20** — Kansas, **22** — Creighton, **25** — at Baylor, **26** — at Baylor, **27** — at Baylor, **29** — Western Illinois, **30** — Western Illinois.

**May 2** — Louisiana-Lafayette, **3** — Louisiana-Lafayette, **4** — Louisiana-Lafayette, **9** — Texas A&M, **10** — Texas A&M, **11** — Texas A&M, **13** — Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium, Omaha, **16** — at Missouri, **17** — at Missouri, **18** — at Missouri.

**May 21-25** — Big 12 Tournament, Oklahoma City

**May 30-June 2** — NCAA Regionals

**June 6-8** — NCAA Super Regionals

**June 14-25** — College World Series, Rosenblatt Stadium, Omaha ■





Junior Molly Hill, who led the Big 12 Conference with a 1.05 ERA last season, was sidelined early after arthroscopic knee surgery.

## 'Win This Pitch'

***With no seniors, NU is 'really focusing'***

**F**or the first time in the program's 33-year history, the Nebraska softball team doesn't have a senior, not one. And that's "refreshing," Rhonda Revelle said.

Refreshing? Some clarification probably is needed.

This is her 16th season in charge of the Huskers. And "it's really been energizing for me as a coach," she said. "I'm taking note and learning a few lessons along the way because maybe it's the way to go. A lot of times, I think we get too far ahead of ourselves."

With no seniors, however, "we're really focusing."

The approach is "win this pitch," one pitch at a time.

Pitching is the name of the game in softball, and Nebraska has an experienced pitcher in junior Molly Hill,

who led the conference in earned-run average (1.05) last season.

Even so, her record was 17-9, evidence she didn't always get much run support. That has to change, and Revelle is confident it will. "I'm really looking forward to scoring some more runs this year, and I think we have the ability to do it," said Revelle.

The Huskers were scheduled to open the season with five games at the Kajikawa Classic in Tempe, Ariz., Feb. 15-17, with Hill unavailable to pitch. She underwent arthroscopic knee surgery in late January and



recovery was expected to take three to five weeks.

Revelle hoped Hill could return, at least in a limited way, for the second weekend's tournament in Louisville, Ky. Until then, Alex Hupp, a sophomore who was 2-0 last season, and Tori Tyson, one of seven freshmen on the roster, were to handle the pitching.

Junior Crystal Carwile has started every game at first base the past two seasons and provided punch in the middle of the batting order, hitting 15 home runs and driving in 69 runs. Those totals are more than the career totals of every other player on the roster combined.



Crystal Carwile

Carwile, Hill and junior outfielder Haley Long all earned second-team all-conference recognition last season. Carwile also was a second-team selection as a freshman.

Juniors Meghan Mullin, an outfielder and lead-off hitter, and Brittany Pascale, a catcher and designated player, are captains along with Hill. "Leadership is critical, and our junior class, they've all stepped up," Revelle said. "We've had a lot of our players step up. If you have great leadership, the coach can focus on coaching the team a little bit more."

With so many young players, the team will go through growing pains, players making mistakes. Revelle expects that and has tried to emphasize the need for patience. "The way I respond is going to be critical to the way they respond," she said.

"I said to the team, 'How do you know when I'm upset or angry?' Because I'm trying to figure out what they're seeing, so I can make sure that I temper that. I'm really trying to do my homework and trying to put myself in a situation each day where I'm responding correctly and not getting frustrated with freshmen the way I might get frustrated with a junior in certain situations. I think that's really important to their learning curve."

She got as many responses to the question as there are players.

In fact, "she doesn't get upset at us

much," said Carwile. "She's really level-headed."

#### MORE SUPPORT

Hill's career record is 35-11. When she gets two or more runs in support, however, her record is 31-1. And she's optimistic about this team's offensive potential.

"It makes me really excited for this year because I see a lot of the players working extra out there, taking a lot of extra hitting," she said. "It's really encouraging."

#### WATCH LIST

Hill is among 50 players included on the watch list for the 2008 USA Softball National Collegiate Player of the Year Award. Eight other Big 12 players, five of them also pitchers, were on the list. Hill is careful to avoid making too much out of the media attention surrounding such awards. "We had a speaker actually say, 'If you believe everything good in the media, then you'll believe everything bad,'" she said. "So I'm just trying to take it . . ."

#### ROSTER

**Infield:** Heidi Foland, Fr., R/R, 5-7; Julie Bechtel, Fr., L/R, 5-4; Crystal Carwile, Jr., L/L, 5-5; Abby Hughes, Fr., R/R, 5-2; Whitney Barrett, So., R/R, 5-5, Kelli Linke, Fr., R/R, 5-7.

**Outfield:** Meghan Mullin, Jr., L/L, 5-4; Haley Long, Jr., L/R, 5-5; Sammi Liegl, Fr., R/R, 5-3; Darcy Rutherford, Jr., L/R, 5-9; Crystal Gonzalez\*, So., L/R, 5-1.

**Catcher:** Ashley Guile, Fr., L/R, 5-9; Amanda Duran, Jr., R/R, 5-6; Brittany Pascale, Jr., R/R, 5-4.

**Pitcher:** Molly Hill, Jr., R/R, 5-9; Tori Tyson, Fr., L/R, 5-9; Alex Hupp, So., R/R, 5-6. \*out for the season with knee injury.

#### REMAINING SCHEDULE

**Feb. 22-24** — Cardinal Classic at Louisville, Ky. (Mississippi, Louisville, Northern Illinois)

**Feb. 29-March 2** — NFCA Leadoff Classic at Columbus, Ga. (Tennessee Tech, Louisiana-Lafayette, North Carolina, Syracuse, Tennessee)

**March 8** — Northern Colorado (DH), **9** — Northern Colorado (DH), **14-17** — Rebel Round Robin at Las Vegas, Nev. (BYU, Utah Valley State, UNLV, Southern Utah), **21-22** — at Texas, **26** — at Creighton, **29-30** — Oklahoma

**April 2** — South Dakota State (DH), **5-6** — at Texas Tech, **9** — Creighton, **12-13** — Baylor, **15** — at Iowa State, **17** — Iowa State, **19-20** — at Oklahoma State, **23** — North Dakota State (DH), **26-27** — Texas A&M, **30** — Kansas (DH)

**May 3-4** — Missouri, **9-11** — Big 12 Tournament at Oklahoma City, **16-18** — NCAA Regionals, **23-25** — NCAA Super-Regionals

**May 29-June 4** — Women's College World Series at Oklahoma City ■

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# Setter Help

## ***Penn State transfer Yanz fills void at Nebraska***

**By Bob Hamar**

**I**t's been a tough couple of months for John Cook and the Husker volleyball team.

First, the Huskers were knocked off by the University of California in the regional finals in early December. That ended the career of three All-American seniors — Sarah Pavan, Christina Houghtelling and Tracy Stalls — as well as valuable back-up setter Maggie Griffin.

The big blow, the one that seemingly came out of the blue, came in early January when junior-to-be Rachel Holloway, a two-time All-American setter, announced she was leaving Nebraska to enroll at Alabama and ending her volleyball career.

Cook said the Husker players reacted as positively as possible to the news. They were upset obviously, but became even more determined to work hard to get ready for the 2008 season.

But there was one big problem. With Holloway gone, and setter Sydney Anderson not coming until the fall, the Huskers didn't have a setter for the spring. Assistant coach Lizzy Stemke, an All-American setter at Wisconsin, could help out in practice, but the Huskers needed an eligible setter to compete in any exhibition matches.

So in the meantime, he went looking for a setter. He found one in Penn State's Jessica Yanz.

The 6-foot Yanz played sparingly for the national championship Nittany Lions, appearing in 35 matches over her two seasons.

"She wanted a chance to compete somewhere," Cook said. "She knew she was taking a chance that she wouldn't get a release."

Yes, that's the hang up now. In Division I volleyball, a player must be given a release by her school to transfer and be eligible to play immediately. If the release is not given, then the player has to sit out the following season.

That means although Yanz is enrolled at Nebraska, she isn't eligible to compete in exhibition matches this spring unless she is given a release by Penn State. Cook said that's still a possibility, but he's not overly optimistic.

"For her to be able to play this spring or fall, she will have to get a release," Cook said. "Right now, Penn State is not cooperating. I don't have any control or say over that. It's between Jessica's family and Penn State."

"She was looking at other schools, but having a scholarship available for a setter after Holloway left, it was a good fit for her. She's a very talented player. We feel very lucky this has kind of worked out."

Yanz would still be able to practice with the team this

spring, but she would not be able to compete in the lone exhibition match on April 12 against Kentucky at the NU Coliseum. That's where Maggie Griffin comes into the picture.

Although Griffin has completed her eligibility, she is still a student and is eligible to play in exhibition matches this spring. Griffin volunteered her services to help out her old teammates.

"I think Maggie is certainly making a statement that she's all about Nebraska volleyball," Cook said. "It's a tremendous example of doing whatever she can to help Nebraska volleyball and her teammates that she cares deeply about. It's a very nice thing for Maggie to be able to help us out. She understands the importance of spring practice."

Cook said all the Husker players volunteered to play setter this spring, but that's not a good option for the team.

"I'm not excited about having some of them be our setter," Cook said. "It's a very difficult position. It's important to have Maggie help out and Jessica to be here to get some good training time in."

All in all, Cook said the Huskers have handled all the turmoil over losing Holloway in a positive manner.

"I think it has brought them very close together," Cook said. "They have welcomed Jess with open arms and embraced her. They are refusing to let the actions of one player who decided not to come back impact their season. They're going to make the best of it."

So Cook will try to make due this spring with Griffin helping out while Yanz is adjusting to life in Nebraska. It's not the ideal situation, but the spring workouts beginning March 16 will still be invaluable to getting the Huskers ready for next season.

"We graduated four players and including Holloway, we have a lot of spots to fill," Cook said. "That's why it's so important for us. Imagine a football team going into spring practice without a quarterback. It's a tough spot to be in."

But with Griffin's help, the Huskers might be able to make the best of the situation. Cook certainly appreciates what Griffin contributed for two seasons as a back-up to Holloway. Now she is just giving more to the program.

"I'm hoping when we're all finished here and Maggie leaves this program, that she's going to look back knowing she made a major contribution," Cook said. "She will be missed. I just hope she really reflects on all she's done for us."

### **MAES LEAVES FOR VIRGINIA**

Head assistant coach Lee Maes is leaving the Husker program to become the head coach at the University of Virginia.

Maes spent three seasons on the Husker staff, handling player training and opponent scouting and working extensively with the middle blockers while serving as the Huskers' recruiting coordinator. ■



Jessica Yanz

*Bob Hamar covers the Nebraska volleyball team for the Grand Island (Neb.) Independent. He can be reached at bob.hamar@theindependent.com*



# TRACK AND FIELD



Nebraska senior Peter van der Westhuizen won the 3,000 meters on the final day of the 33rd Annual Frank Sevigne Husker Invitational Feb. 2. His winning time of 8:07.50 ranked third all-time on the Husker indoor list.



Freshman Karyn LaCour (left) led a trio of Huskers to a 1-2-3 finish in the 60-meter hurdles at the Sevigne meet. She won the event with an NCAA provisional qualifying mark of 8.39, fifth all-time on the NU chart. Arna Erega (middle) was second, and Nikita Eades (right) finished third.



# Contractual Matters

Although Bo Pelini was introduced as Nebraska's head football coach on Dec. 2, the signing of his contract wasn't announced until Jan. 23. The time lag wasn't an indication of problems, however. "It has been a simple, straight-forward process, he said

Athletic Director Tom Osborne agreed. "There were no protracted negotiations and no agents. Everything went smoothly," said Osborne, who expected the delay.

First, Pelini coached the Louisiana State defense in the national championship Sugar Bowl game. And then he was immersed in Nebraska's recruiting. "We knew all along that this contract would take until at least mid-January," Osborne said.

Pelini signed a five-year contract with a base salary of \$1.1 million annually and performance incentives in the classroom as well as on the field.

For example, if the Cornhuskers were to play in the Big 12 Championship game, Pelini would earn \$150,000. And if they were to win, he would earn an additional \$250,000. The same amounts would apply to playing in and winning the BCS national championship game.

Academically, if the team's graduation rate is equal to or higher than the student body's overall, Pelini would earn an additional \$125,000, with further compensation from \$25,000 to \$125,000 based on the NCAA's Academic Performance Rating (APR).

If Pelini were to leave Nebraska prior to Dec. 31, 2008, he would owe the university \$1 million. That amount would diminish by \$250,000 in each of the next three years. His predecessor, Bill Callahan, had no such buyout provision.

Callahan, who had just signed a new contract worth \$1.75 million annually, also didn't have a mitigation clause in his contract, which meant Nebraska paid him \$3.125 million after terminating his employment. If Pelini were to be in the same situation and take another job, Nebraska would be responsible for paying him the difference between his new salary and what he would have been paid — if the Nebraska salary were higher.

Pelini's salary ranks eighth in the Big 12, ahead of the salaries of Iowa State's Gene Chizik, Oklahoma State's Mike Gundy, Colorado's Dan Hawkins and Kansas State's Ron Prince.

## Salaries of Pelini's assistants:

**Shawn Watson, offensive coordinator:** \$225,000  
**Carl Pelini, defensive coordinator:** \$190,000  
**Ron Brown, tight ends:** \$190,000  
**Barney Cotton, offensive line:** \$190,000  
**Ted Gilmore, receivers:** \$190,000  
**Marvin Sanders, secondary:** \$190,000  
**Tim Beck, running backs:** \$160,000  
**James Dobson, strength coach:** \$130,000  
**Mike Ekeler, linebackers:** \$120,000  
**John Papuchis, defensive ends:** \$120,000

## STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING

James Dobson, an assistant strength coach at Iowa the last nine years, is Nebraska's new football strength coach, replacing Dave Kennedy, who resigned and was hired by new coach Mike Sherman at Texas A&M. Dobson is a graduate of Wisconsin, where he worked as a student assistant with the Badgers football team for



James Dobson



Bo Pelini signed a five-year contract with a base salary of \$1.1 million annually.

three seasons.

Those with whom he worked at Iowa include NFL players Bob Sanders, Robert Gallery and Dwight Clark. The Mt. Horeb, Wis., native also spent two years as an assistant strength and conditioning coach at SMU, working with the football, volleyball and basketball teams.

The Cornhuskers' winter conditioning program, under Dobson's direction, began on Jan. 21. Every player who was expected to return did, according to Pelini.

## FAMILIAR FACES

Pelini's first staff includes Jon Osterhout and Curt Baldus as graduate assistants. Neither is a stranger to Cornhusker football. Osterhout was a grad assistant, working with the defense, the past two seasons under Bill Callahan, while Baldus worked on the Nebraska video staff in 2006. He was at the University of Buffalo last season.

## LUCKY STAYS

Eight days before the announcement regarding Pelini's contract, I-back Marlon Lucky announced he would be returning for his senior season. Lucky had looked into the possibility of declaring for the NFL draft. Lucky rushed for 1,019 yards and nine touchdowns and caught a school-record 75 passes for 705 yards and three touchdowns last season.

Going into the 2008 season, Lucky will be among the top three to five senior running backs, Scott Wright of NFL Draft Countdown told the Lincoln Journal Star.

Several outstanding junior running backs declared for the draft, among them Jamaal Charles of Texas, Rashard Mendenhall of Illinois, Ray Rice of Rutgers, James Davis of Clemson and both Darren McFadden and Felix Jones of Arkansas.

## WATSON STAYS, TOO

Offensive coordinator Shawn Watson turned down an opportunity to be offensive coordinator for coach Nick Saban at Alabama. In mid-January, reports that Saban was interested in hiring Watson surfaced. Watson was invited to fly to Tuscaloosa, Ala., to discuss the position but declined. "I deeply appreciate the opportunity that Coach Pelini and Coach Osborne have given me," he said in a release announcing he was staying.



## KEEP AN EYE ON GANZ

Cornhusker quarterback Joe Ganz was slated to attend the 53rd annual Touchdown Club of Columbus (Ohio) Sports Banquet in early February. The senior-to-be was named a college "player to watch" in 2008. Ganz started the final three games last season, after senior Sam Keller was sidelined, passing for 1,399 yards and 15 touchdowns.

## SPECIAL MENTION

Pelini emphasized the team aspect of recruiting on letter-of-intent-signing day, acknowledging everyone involved, from those in academic support to the secretaries in the football office. However, receivers coach Ted Gilmore and offensive coordinator Shawn Watson, who were retained from Bill Callahan's staff, earned special mention.

"They were a tremendous resource for us and really led this recruiting class," said Pelini. "I appreciate their efforts . . . from the time I took the job until now."

Gilmore serves as the Cornhuskers' recruiting coordinator, and "I cherish him in the role he's in because he does a heck of a job," Pelini said. "I think he's the man as far as heading up our recruiting, hopefully for a lot of years to come."

## LANDING JOBS

Bill Callahan wasn't long without a coaching job, no surprise there. New York Jets coach Eric Mangini hired Callahan in mid-January, two months after his contract at Nebraska wasn't renewed, to work with the offensive line and running game.

Callahan also was being considered for a job with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Before coming to Nebraska, he had spent nine seasons in the NFL, including three as offensive line coach with the Philadelphia Eagles, four as offensive coordinator for coach Jon Gruden with the Oakland Raiders and two as head coach of the Raiders.

The Raiders led the NFL in rushing in 2000, with him as coordinator, while they led the NFL in passing his first season as head coach.

Five of Callahan's Cornhusker assistants also have landed jobs - Watson and Ted Gilmore were retained by Pelini. Defensive line coach Buddy Wyatt has been hired by Texas A&M, joining running backs coach Randy Jordan, who had been hired earlier. Cornerbacks coach Phil Elmassian has been hired as co-defensive coordinator at Louisiana-Monroe. And tight ends coach Joe Rudolph returned to Wisconsin, his alma mater, to coach tight ends.

Offensive line coach Dennis Wagner is now the head coach at Western Carolina.

In addition, former Callahan assistant Jay Norvell, the offensive coordinator at UCLA last season, is now co-offensive coordinator at Oklahoma. Coach Bob Stoops hired Norvell after Kevin Sumlin became the head coach at Houston.

Norvell was looking for a job after coach Karl Dorrell and his staff at UCLA were fired. Norvell will coach the Sooners' wide receivers.

# QUICK HITS

## VOICE OF THE HUSKERS

Greg Sharpe's first official duty after being named play-by-play announcer for Cornhusker football and baseball was serving as emcee for a football recruiting dinner in Lincoln on the day after Bo Pelini's letter-of-intent-signing news conference. Sharpe was named to replace Jim Rose, who resigned for personal reasons with three games remaining last football season.

Sharpe, who filled in on the play-by-play for those final three games, will continue as the play-by-play announcer for men's and women's basketball on Fox Sports Net, in addition to being the host of football and baseball coaches' television shows.

The native of Olathe, Kan., is a two-time Kansas "Sportscaster of the Year," spending the past 21 years at station WIBW in Topeka. He was the play-by-play voice of Kansas State football and basketball from 1996 to 2002.

## TENNIS ANYONE

The Husker men's and women's tennis teams opened their spring seasons in late January. Coach Scott Jacobson's women, with five letter-winners returning from a group that won 13 duals last season, were off to one of the best starts in school history, winning their first five matches, all sweeps. Imke Reimers is the team's only senior.

### WOMEN'S ROSTER

Jane Albers, Fr. (Papenburg, Germany); Abby Buxton, Fr. (Eden Prairie, Minn.); Amber Chandronnait, Fr. (Bow, N.H.); Marianne Cicmanec, Jr. (Kirchdorf, Germany); Stephanie Evans, Fr. (Lebanon, Tenn.); Ashley Finnegan, Jr. (Weston, Fla.); Reimers (Papenburg, Germany); Maria Ring, Jr. (Linghem, Sweden); Wiveca Swarting (Stockholm, Sweden).

### REMAINING SCHEDULE

**Feb. 15** — St. Louis, **16** — Central Oklahoma, **22** — at Iowa State, **24** — Southeast Missouri State, **29** — Air Force.

**March 2** — Northern Iowa, **8** — Baylor, **14** — Texas Tech, **20** — at Loyola Marymount, **28** — at Texas A&M, **29** — at Texas.

**April 5** — at Oklahoma State, **6** — at Oklahoma, **11** — Missouri, **13** — Colorado, **18** — at Kansas, **20** — Kansas State, **24-27** — Big 12 Championships at College Station, Texas.

Coach Kerry McDermott Husker men's team is attempting to improve on last season's 9-11 record and fourth-place finish in the conference, their best since 2002.

### MEN'S ROSTER

David Bendheim, So. (Frankfurt, Germany); Taylor Boney, Fr. (Lincoln, Neb.); Karl Jones, Sr. (Fareham, England); Renato Melo, Jr. (Belo Horizonte, Brazil); Calin Paar, Fr. (Munich, Germany); Tobias Schneider, Fr. (San Antonio, Texas); Hendrik Stahmer, Jr. (Hamburg, Germany); Mark Tate, Sr. (The Woodlands, Texas); Francois Van Impe, So. (Brussels, Belgium).

### REMAINING SCHEDULE

**Feb. 15** — Texas-San Antonio, **16** — DePaul, **17** — Drake, **22** — at Fresno State, **29** — H.E.B. Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas.

**March 1-2** — H.E.B. Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas, **7** — Western Michigan, **9** — New Mexico, **14** — Indiana State at Johnson City, Tenn., **15** — East Tennessee State at Johnson City, Tenn., **21** — Southern Mississippi at Hattiesburg, Miss., **22** — South Alabama at Hattiesburg, Miss., **29** — at Wichita State.

**April 4** — Oklahoma State, **5** — Texas, **11** — Texas A&M, **13** — at Texas Tech, **18** — Baylor, **20** — at Oklahoma, **24-27** — Big 12 Championships at Austin, Texas.

**May 18-26** — NCAA Championships at Athens, Ga.

## ONE HUNDRED AND COUNTING

Senior women's gymnast Emily Parsons won three individual event titles to surpass 100 for her career during a dual at the Devaney Sports Center in early February. Even so, the Huskers, ranked No. 12 nationally at the time, lost to No. 5 Michigan, before a crowd of 2,416.

Parsons won the all-around, beam and floor exercise to increase her career total to 101 event titles. Sophomore teammate Tricia Woo tied her for first on beam and floor.

Woo was honored as the Big 12 Event Specialist of the Week for her performance at Oklahoma the previous week, after finishing third on floor with a season-high 9.875. It was the second time Woo, a three-time All-American, earned the Big 12 honor.

Parsons and Husker senior Desire' Sniatynski each earned Big 12 Gymnast of the Week recognition during January.

## THINK PINK

What's this? The Nebraska women's basketball team wore white uniforms trimmed in pink with pink jersey numbers (inside a black border) for its game against Oklahoma State at the Devaney Sports Center on Feb. 10. The Huskers also wore pink warm-up jerseys, as did Oklahoma State, in support of a breast cancer awareness program.

Oklahoma State, ranked No. 17 at the time, won the game 92-81, before a season-high home crowd of 6,756. The final score didn't reflect the drama, however. The hot-shooting Cowgirls took a 76-45 lead with 10:38 remaining. But a furious Nebraska rally cut the deficit to nine with 1:10 left. Oklahoma State made 9-of-10 free throws in the final minute to seal the victory. ■



# GYMNASTICS



Sophomore Brittnee Habbib competes in the floor exercise during a recent meet for the 12th-ranked Nebraska women's team.



Junior T.J. Schmidt became the first NU gymnast to advance to the final round of the Winter Cup meet in Las Vegas. He was one of only 42 athletes to qualify for the final round on Feb. 9. His best finish came on pommel horse, where he placed 15th.



# CROSSWORD

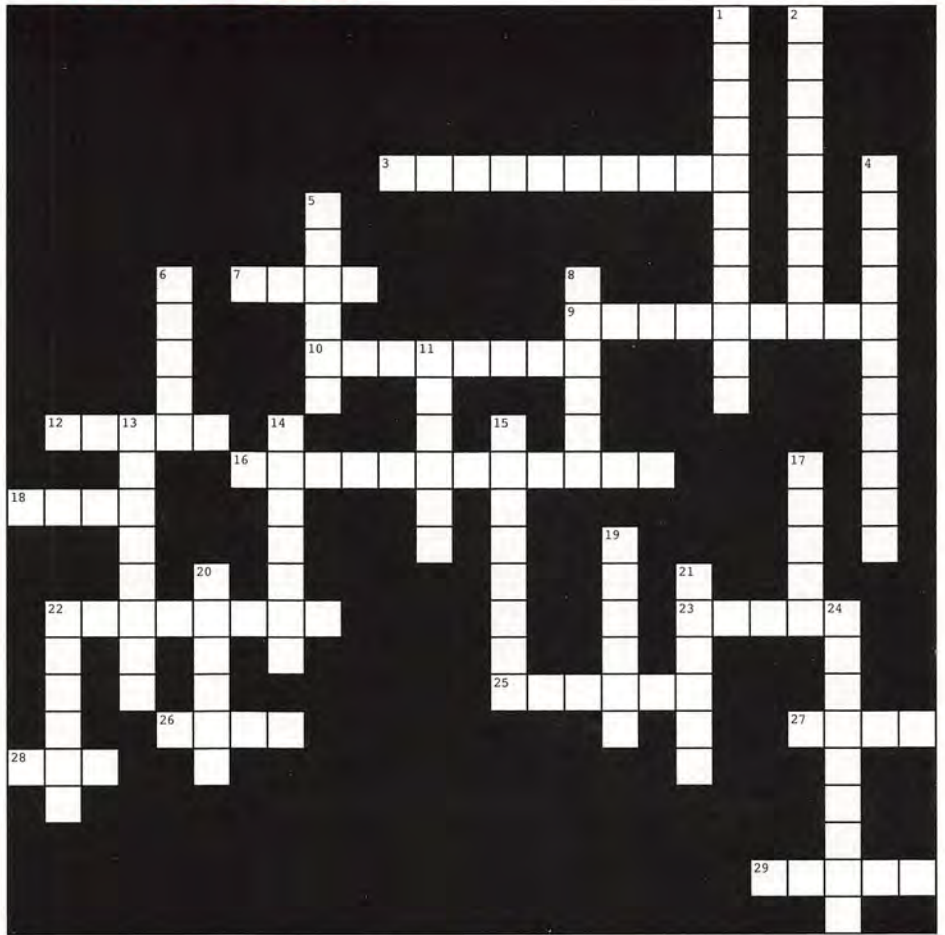
## ACROSS

- 3 April 19 event
- 7 Bill Callahan's new team
- 9 Ex-Husker offensive lineman with Patriots
- 10 2007 Big 12 South champion
- 12 Quarterback recruit
- 16 Top nonconference opponent in 2008
- 18 Running backs coach
- 22 2007 Big 12 North champion
- 23 Number of home games in 2008
- 25 Ex-Husker on N.Y. Giants' practice squad
- 26 Top returning pitcher on baseball team
- 27 Passed for 16 touchdowns in 2007
- 28 Winner in 2007 Spring Game
- 29 Had 75 receptions in 2007

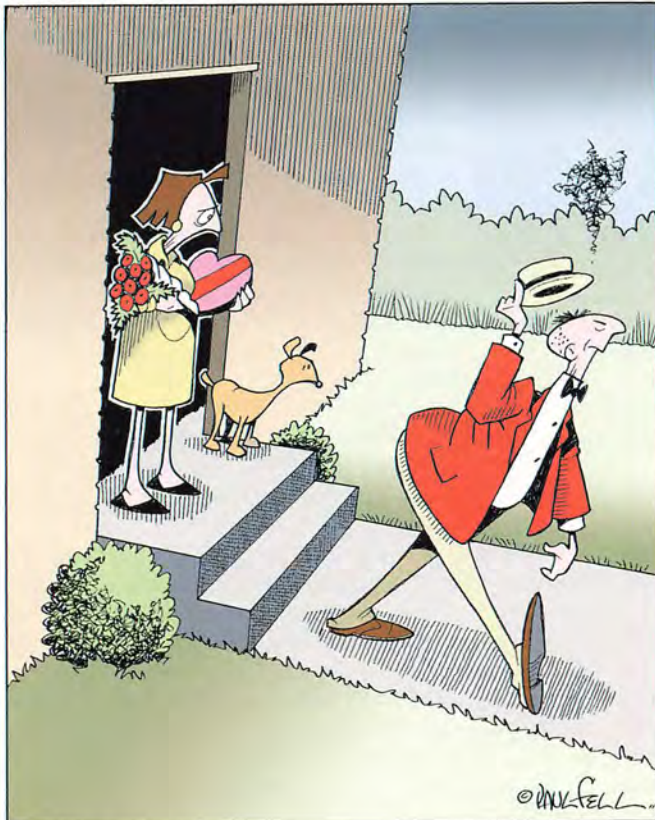
## DOWN

- 1 Ex-Husker in NFL Pro Bowl
- 2 Bo Pelini's alma mater
- 4 5-star recruit
- 5 Offensive coordinator
- 6 Tight ends coach
- 8 New football play-by-play announcer
- 11 Leading tackler returning
- 13 Doc Sadler's alma mater
- 14 Recruiting coordinator
- 15 Defensive ends coach
- 17 Ex-Husker defensive lineman with Patriots
- 19 Defensive coordinator
- 20 New strength coach
- 21 Kicked 8 field goals in 2007
- 22 Basketball point guard
- 24 First 2008 road opponent

Answers in April issue



## HUSKERNUTZ



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## FEBRUARY CROSSWORD SOLUTION





## Offering An Opportunity

*'You walk in with an N on your shirt  
in this state, and that means something'*



**Mike  
BABCOCK**

IN THE SUMMER OF 1978, after graduating high school, Mitch Krenk got in his car and drove the 40 miles from Nebraska City to Lincoln, pulled into the South Stadium parking lot and went to the football offices on the second floor.

He was there to meet Tom Osborne, who wasn't expecting him, didn't know him from a blocking sled as far as that goes. But he wanted to play football at Nebraska, and he figured the best way to do it was by talking directly to the head coach.

His resume wasn't overly impressive. He was a good athlete at Nebraska City High School. But he had attended the Cornhuskers' summer camp the year before without drawing interest as a walk-on, much less as a scholarship recruit.

Peru State was about the only school that had shown any interest, in fact, offering limited financial aid. But he was undaunted. He was going to walk on.

When you're 18-years old, you can be naïve about such things.

Osborne was in, and when he heard Krenk talking to the secretary, he emerged from his office. Krenk introduced himself and explained the reason for his visit.

Osborne asked about his grades, whether or not he had been a good student. Krenk said he had been. Osborne told him if he was accepted for admission, he could come out for the team. Beyond that, however, there would be no guarantees.

Krenk spent his first season on the scout squad. His locker was in the north fieldhouse, home to freshmen (except a rare few who played with the varsity), redshirts and players who had never risen on the depth chart and remained on the scout squad.

Krenk was one of those. He would stay in the north fieldhouse and on the scout squad into his third year. But at least he was still around. During winter conditioning as a freshman, he was assigned to the "dirt group," walk-ons who weren't recruited.

The dirt group got its nickname from the dusty "mushroom gardens," the indoor track that was once beneath the east stands of Memorial Stadium. Nearly 30 years later, Krenk remembered being the only one in the dirt group to survive that winter.

Walk-ons have always been offered an opportunity, but nothing more.

Krenk persevered, and his final two seasons, he alternated at tight end with Jamie Williams. And after finishing at Nebraska, he spent time with the Chicago Bears, includ-

ing the 1985 season, when they won the Super Bowl.

He is president of the N Club now, and a regular at Nebraska basketball games. His son Nick plays for coach Doc Sadler, walking on just as he did.

His story is unique. But it is also typical of the stories of the countless walk-ons who have contributed to Nebraska's rich football tradition. And as much as anyone, he understands and appreciates Bo Pelini's commitment to the walk-on program.

The program didn't disappear under Bill Callahan, as some feared it would. But Callahan didn't exactly embrace walk-ons either, particularly early on, when he wouldn't allow them on the field during pregame warm-ups. They got in the way, he said.

Pelini sees them differently. Though out-of-state walk-ons are part of the tradition, most have come from Nebraska, from areas with "a deep love for the state of Nebraska, for the university and for our football program," he said on letter-of-intent signing day. "The more people you bring into a culture that have strong beliefs about something and have a strong commitment and want-to, it's going to make you stronger in the future."

In addition to 28 scholarship players, Pelini's first recruiting class includes 30 walk-ons, 18 of whom were announced on letter-of-intent signing day. The others hadn't completed the paperwork for admission to the university.

Only one of the players Nebraska recruited as a walk-on turned down the opportunity. The Cornhuskers were 30-of-31. "You walk in with an N on your shirt in this state, and that means something," said offensive line coach Barney Cotton.

Nebraska had walk-ons before Osborne succeeded Bob Devaney as head coach. But they became an essential element of the program early in his tenure, as the NCAA reduced scholarships from 105 to 95 to 92 to 88 and finally to 85 in 1994.

In 1982, Osborne welcomed more than 70 walk-ons to practice. The year before, the number was nearly 90. That's how it was when Krenk came to Lincoln.

The way he remembered it, he was among more than 100 freshman hopefuls in 1978, when the annual scholarship limit was 30 — plus Osborne always held back three or four to award to walk-ons who climbed to the top two on the depth chart.

Though the numbers aren't the same, the walk-on principle still is.

"I think the stronger the walk-on program is, the more we can keep it strong, the better off our program is going to be for a long time," Pelini said. ■



**Mitch Krenk earned  
two letters at NU and  
spent time in the NFL.**



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